MEN AND GHOSTS

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MEN AND GHOSTS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NOVELS

A DELIVERANCE
LOVE IN A LIFE
DYING FIRES

PLAYS

MARY BROOME
THE EDUCATION OF MR SURRAGE
FOUR TRAGEDIES
WAR PLAYS

MEN AND GHOSTS

BY

ALLAN MONKHOUSE

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PROLOGUE

I HAD thought of telling my story—if it be a story — from the outside, but I want to make it intimate and searching; I want to get at the truth, though truth, I know, is hydra-headed. It is not always shapely, and what there is of the artist in me may lead sometimes to the attempt at form; the most ingenuous of us cannot be a mechanical recorder. It is all in my mind and imagination must bring it to light. I do want to shape it for her, I want to re-create it. This episode of my life—which it now seems to me is my life—must be set down in such order and sequence as I can accomplish. It is too precious to lose and it is better to take the chance of its becoming fixed and finite in the narrative than that it should be dim. I am not thinking of my friends or the public or the shadowy posterity to which what is vain and grandiose in one might wish to appeal. Yet one has to die some day and to leave everything, and when the time comes one will be reluctant to clear out of the old world; even a few thoughts and imaginings scrawled on paper give a sort of hold. And, above all, this is to be my tribute to her—yes and, whether she

ever reads it or not, my appeal. I suppose I've lost her; I never had her; but no one has ever been to her as I. No one? Ah! There's the point. Besides me, there's a ghost in this narrative, and a very real man.

All this is very portentous, and one doesn't want a heavy manner for even such serious events. I suppose I ought to make up my mind now whether she is to see this and I'm sure, at least, that I shall write as though she were. If I died first I might leave it to her; a little conventional perhaps, but one must not fear to ape the conventions. She might be an old, peaceful woman. She might have passed through tranquillity into a kind of somnolence. It is melancholy to think of her so and it might be dreadful to disturb her. While she had life and possessed her soul, she would not shrink from the disturbing experience; but a time might come when she could not hold her own strongly against me. It wouldn't be fair to launch this from my strength at her weakness. I'm not malicious.

Perhaps I shall never speak intimately to her again, perhaps I shall not see her, though I think she would never avoid me. I suppose she knows me better than I know her. In my commerce with her I was guilty of many lapses and stupidities—she wasn't always a paragon of wisdom herself—

but she knows me well enough. I seem to be tending to an acquiescence that is dreadfully middle-aged and it isn't the truth; I shall never get at the truth. It's all no time ago and yet I'm wondering how to recapture the spirit of youth. For we had youth, as well as some of the premature disillusions. We were young and rash, and tenacious of our ideas, our parts, our sides, though she would never parade them. I was never masterful and it may be that it's the mistake of my life; I've always had a great contempt for the masterful, the pseudo-strong. And yet, and yet—would it have served me?

I shall set down things of no account because she would like to know of them. (O dear! what will become of my shapely narrative?) There may not be much that she doesn't know for I sometimes indulged in talk about myself, though she was generally rather a cautious sympathiser. She was very funny sometimes in her sympathies and curiosities, her little alarms and reservations; she would never give herself away. I've said to myself a thousand times that she was a cold woman. I've told her that she was like our old Earth: a fair outside, a cold, impenetrable crust, perhaps an inner fire. She trusted me, she put me on my honour, and she escaped. I'm not masterful, I'm only strong (let me put it so) and

I want to go no further than the truth will carry me. Here it is then, Rose, and whether this is the end or not I don't know. I shan't spend my life in repinings, I shan't make a cult of failure. Life isn't all spinning out of one's vitals and secrecies and denials and widowhoods. Some day there may be a peremptory call—a trumpet call. If you will have it so this, then, is only an episode. But before we come to it I'll tell you something about myself.

[And now, reading over what I've so far written, I see my danger. It *is* portentous and I'm on the way to make tragedies out of trifles, to be enraptured by the tame. This isn't a tragedy or, at any rate, it isn't mine. I must keep out of the limelight and even refrain from turning it too strong on the others. I daresay it's all a comedy if I could but see it so, if I were detached and serene.]

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

I WAS born—let us get to the beginning—at Balliol, the fine, windy old town that stands just on the Durham side of the Tees and stretches downward and across the river into Yorkshire. It was in a little unobtrusive semi-detached house that looks precisely the kind of thing that our eminent men affect for birthplace; you may see dozens of them reproduced in the newspapers as deaths or centenaries come round. My father was then running a carpet factory that stood on the town side of the Tees, and about a year after my birth it was abandoned. I think that for years it had been a decaying industry, and that my father had been left in it as a kind of scapegoat by other members of his family, who had managed to escape to more profitable occupations. So, with the four children, as we were then, he and my mother had to seek their fortunes elsewhere, and they came to Manchester where my father became a salesman and traveller with a firm of carpet merchants to which he formerly used to sell goods. It must have been a sad flitting though I never heard any

sentiment wasted over it. One of the marks of my childhood—and indeed of later days—was an ormolu clock that stood always on our dining-room mantelpiece and I must have read the inscription upon it hundreds of times. It was presented to my father by the poor residue of workmen who were with him to the last and who, like him, had to seek for employment that was not easy to get. Perhaps the inscription was a little flowery or conventional; I remember how "Employer and Friend" stood out with large emphasis in the old monumental manner; but that clock had a great historical value in the family, and of the many readings of the inscription some were not without emotion. We often returned for visits to the old town, and many a time when I have been with my father he has stopped for a friendly interchange with some old workman. Even when I was quite young I felt these meetings to be wistful, melancholy; and yet, associated with the clock at home, they were honourable and important.

The earlier visits were to my grandfather, a stout old Methodist who carried on the great traditions that had culminated so gloriously when his father —or was it his grandfather?—turned the hosepipe away from the reverend figure of John Wesley and gave the sousing to the ribald crowd instead. It

was this ancestor, I think, that in his unregenerate youth had been a slave-trader—so the grim rumour ran—and afterwards had sailed with Captain Cook. A snuff-box presented to him, it is alleged, by the great Captain, is one of the outstanding properties of the family to-day. As a sceptical young man, I handled it and was startled to find an inscription of complete confirmation, perfectly handsome and explicit. It was a cousin of my father who owned the snuff-box and in his unscrupulous enthusiasm he had repaired the omission of Captain Cook and made the record positive; and so, perhaps, is history made. This cousin, too, conducted some kind of investigation into the family history and from the veritable ownership of a little land on the Yorkshire side of the Tees he made a fair showing of family dignity. There was certainly nothing in the least aristocratic about the family in our day. A chemist's shop with a department for grocery was one of my grandfather's ventures, even when he had his factory too; if I am not mistaken he was at the same time a bank manager, for in those days a country bank was open only for a few hours on a few days of the week.

Even Methodists like a bit of romance and I don't think my grandfather or his sons and sons-in-law, most of whom were Wesleyan ministers or preachers, really disliked to think that some bold,

reprehensible spirits had been before them, especially if they were—in the phrase so familiar in the sect — brands plucked from the burning. My father, though, became a churchman or, at any rate, a churchwarden, even before he left his native town. He became a churchwarden, I take it, by virtue of an eminence or obviousness in the community that would naturally overbear any little sectarian differences. I remember, too, that my uncle Joseph, though a Wesleyan preacher, was churchwarden of the village of Egliston. The institution has power even over the spirit, as cynical youth may soon discover.

My mother was a Londoner and my father met her when he was employed in the London warehouse of the then comparatively prosperous carpet factory. She died when I was six—almost five years after we came to Manchester — and my memories of her are few and dim. I remember her standing on a chair and pulling clothes out of a wardrobe for a hurried packing that was somehow associated with misfortune; I think it was a call to the bedside of my eldest brother of whom I have no recollections at all for the little chap died and became just a name attached to a photograph or two and a plaster medallion that hung always in my father's bedroom. Another memory is my mother's crinoline, and the ballooning of it when

she sat down. I seem to remember, too, an occasion when she walked sadly—why do I think it was sadly?—on the other side of the street, as I watched her from the nursery window, with her dress—a dull drab dress—trailing, according to the custom of the time, on the pavement. She is a vaguely beneficent figure. I have no image of her face that is not confounded with the photographs, in which she appears worn and repressed and placid.

She died, and I remember the darkened rooms when I returned from the neighbour's where we had been housed and I can recall some pomp of funeral and swathings in black crape. My great-uncle Pennyfeather — my mother's uncle — was there, and I rode in a carriage with him and my father and listened to their heavy talk. Perhaps it was then and there that he suggested taking me into his studio when I should be ready for it and, long afterwards, I nursed it as a secret grievance that the offer was not accepted and fulfilled. Pennyfeather was a sculptor in the days when sculpture was a fashion rather than an art and I remember his great studio in London with its awesome traditions of royal personages as models. My mother's father was a sculptor too, and his grandfather worked in the studio of Sir Francis Chantrey. When we brothers and sisters were aspiring young people, it was a family joke that

the finest human product came by Methodism on the one side and Sculpture on the other. Sculptors ran in my mother's family and cousin Goode, my godfather, was one of the most eminent of them or the most fortunate; he stayed with us in Manchester for the unveiling of some of his royal figures. He was a gentle, thoughtful-looking man and once when I went with my father to see him in London he gave me a sovereign. It was beyond my scope and, quite honestly, I pocketed it for a shilling. Taking it out presently to have a look at it the gold gave me a queer shock and I told my father of the mistake that had been made. Rather doubtfully he agreed to my suggestion that we should return to Mr. Goode to put the matter right; but Goode closed my hand on it and patted it kindly, so that I understood it was really for me. Never since have I felt so rich.

I think Goode was a kind man and I suppose he must have had some sort of ability but he belonged to a tradesmen's epoch and he soon became obsolete. Not one in ten thousand of the Manchester people who pass his statues every day has ever heard his name. I have sometimes wished that these statues were better, that they had some quality beyond the conventional suavity of their period, and there is, indeed, one of a rugged historical figure which points to something

better. We young people did not deceive ourselves; we were honest on the whole and perhaps we had something of honesty's excesses; an ideal statuette of Goode's, which was one of our drawing-room treasures, became a mark for our derision. Scepticism crept into our lives, and I have laboured always under the sceptical habit. I remember how we all seized with a cynical delight upon a letter which, for some cause or other, was preserved in the family archives. It was from a palace and it asked one of our sculptor relatives to repair thither with his sandpaper so that, under instructions, he could modify the contours of the nose and so perfect a personage's bust. As children we had such things in common or, at first, the elder of us had. We had some little pride in a poetess in the family—the lady had at least produced a volume of verse at a time when such a thing was less common than it is now—but I don't think she ever fell under our critical appraisement; perhaps because the volume disappeared. And we had a more thrilling pride in the claim through our mother of some distant relationship to Nelson. I must have boasted of it for I recall some railing half-envious ridicule by my schoolmates of the "fifth cousin to Nelson."

When we first came to Manchester we lived in a very little house at the end of a row in Bury New

Road and, though for long afterwards I had no standard of comparison, we must have been very poor. We had no garden but there was a kind of neglected field behind called "the hill" where we played and made some sort of intimacies with other children. At the side of our house was an "entry" closed by an iron gate, and in climbing over this one day I failed to clear the spikes, one of which caught the leg of my trousers — this prompts the reflection that I must have worn trousers very young; possibly they were passed on to me by a growing elder brother. I hung suspended and howling till the cloth of the trousers gave way and I fell to the ground. I was not much hurt but a good deal shaken and perturbed and the rent in the trousers seemed a serious affair. Questioned as to how it was done, I said I didn't know. It was the first plumb lie that I remember to have told—and indeed I have generally avoided them. It swelled enormously in my imagination and I suffered torments of remorse; I confessed, I am sure, though I don't remember the details of this, but only, rather hazily, that I was given to understand I was making a great fuss about no great matter. I don't even remember to whom the confession was made; it was long after my mother's death.

But in those days it was no trifle to sin. I don't

think that the horrific warnings prevented the deceptions and evasions of children but they sometimes induced a deep discomfort. We were taught that there was no evading the Judgment Day, and, as we understood, a little thing one way or the other might make all the difference. Half-measures were out of the question, and we were either to be caught up into a nebulous heaven associated with musical exercises or to burn in hell for ever. This is what children were taught when I was young—in books, in sermons, in all kinds of terrifying hints. In Methodist and Evangelical homes it was common to display pictures reproduced from the paintings of a man named Martin whose ludicrous, insipid heaven was effaced by the terrors of the Day of Judgment and the Day of Wrath. Christianity has some crimes to its discredit but there can be nothing blacker in its history than this persistent oppression and terrorising of the young at a time when, outside it, all manner of liberal and benignant ideas illuminated the world. We did not succumb, because we could hardly realise these grisly horrors, and presently we began to revolt. I was not an imaginative boy but I was easily frightened and, sleeping or waking, like my fellows, I suffered from the fears of death and hell. And they became translated into a menace of wider scope, which darkened all the world. I was not

imaginative, but I can recall a period of my boyhood—it might have been weeks or months—when life had lost its savour and my heart never leapt. Possibly it was between seasons and football or hockey—"shinny," as we called it—would help to heal the wound that the close of cricket had left. My salient memory of the time is a race through a shallow pond—a reprehensible proceeding that should have dissipated any temporary gloom—but through all the striving and the splashing, I was heavily conscious of reserves of misery, of the strange absence of joy.

My father did not hold with the extremes of these terrifying doctrines, and I think that other members of his family shook their heads over him sometimes. It did not occur to him to make any particular effort to reassure us but his comparative liberalism induced a beginning of scepticism, and this is a weed that grows. We began to understand that in matters of religion words frequently meant "something else"; Christian doctrine seems to have accomplished miracles in meaning something else. I think that when the time for confirmation came scepticism had made considerable inroads. I made some poor kind of attempt to become worthy under the ministrations of a stout curate, a familiar, jovial figure on the suburban cricket-ground which was a centre of interest to me and

my schoolmates. He did his best to brace up a dozen or so of us to the spiritual ordeal and I made hard, dull efforts to raise my prayers into something real and salutary: sometimes I accomplished a stirring of emotions. At the confirmation, when old Bishop Fraser laid his hand on my head, I thrilled with vague devotion, vague intentions. He was human and kindly and at the end of his address he advised us to go home quietly, to keep ourselves for a while from the world's contact, to maintain the solemn mood. I meant to do so, but waiting outside the church door was a boy with whom I had watched the beginnings of a match in the early afternoon, and I could not refrain from "Who won?"

The next morning early I took the Sacrament for the first and only time. I met one of my mates of the day before with his sister and we sat together. The gravity was disturbed by whisperings and fumblings for collection money and I was shyly conscious of the girl's presence; she was older than I. "This is a bit too solemn for me," said my friend, and I felt my superiority for to me the solemnity was good, and I desired even a deeper experience. The gulp of wine came strangely to me but the nervous exaltation of mood would not shape itself into any meaning. And I never went again; I hardly know why. There was no com-

pulsion, no definite inducement; I was shy and the tide of scepticism was rising.

I was astonished one day to hear a young doctor, who was a friend of the family, speak of Darwin with respect. He had been a subject for gross ridicule as the lunatic who said we were descended from monkeys and I remember in the pantomime a grotesque figure of a baboon-like creature which seemed to me quite an adequate commentary on such foolery. It was a good deal later that I read *The Origin of Species,* which changed the world to me, and in the meantime my elder brother, who was interested in geology, had thrown out some hints that the Book of Genesis would require some humouring if it was to square with the facts. The precious doctrine that in the Bible words meant something else was easily sufficient to make the six days of Creation into six vast geological periods, and I think we were comforted by the belief that Genesis had got them in the right order. My friend the doctor did a little sapping in other directions, and I remember one day his asking me, with a grin, whether I didn't think him a wicked atheist. I was perturbed at a question which did penetrate to something in my thoughts and I told him, with great politeness, that I thought he had some very peculiar opinions. I respected him and I still respect him. He unsettled me, as the saying

is, but his mind had an edge that would cut cleanly, and he cared for truth—perhaps he saw that I did too.

There was a time when I thirsted for what used to be called — perhaps is still called — Christian evidences. I was not a religious or imaginative or in any way unusual child but the importance of the Christian religion was taken for granted and I had been led to believe that those who did not accept it in the plain sense were the enemies of mankind. No gracious figure of Christ presided over my childhood though I tried sometimes to find comfort or illumination in imagining his presence; responsibilities and menaces were always there and a moderate dilution of Judgment and Wrath was useful to maintain order in the nursery. And perhaps, in some of its manifestations, truth has no greater enemy than loyalty; one must not go to the other camp under less than a spiritual compulsion. I went to church and listened to the sermons with annoyance that swelled to anger. They preached about frigid trifles that could not matter or when I was roused by some reference that came near to what I wanted, off sailed the parson again, amid clouds of rhetoric, taking for granted the things that did matter. Why would they not come to the point, and prove that the Christian religion was true? I wanted Genesis to

be set right, and a veritable spar of the Ark to be found on Ararat; or, at least, some reasonable hypothesis of how the water became wine and Lazarus rose from the dead; I wanted proof that these things had happened. Does not every child want tangible proofs? Ah! but I was not an imaginative boy and Christianity now does not depend on the kind of proofs that I craved. It has floated away from the moorings that seemed so vastly important to me; it has become adaptable to man's needs; its professors are liberal and tactful and as humanity presses upon them they will make every reasonable concession.

Things were slipping awfully away and I was grateful to those who, like Bishop Fraser, tried to arrest them. He preached at our church not infrequently and Huxley and Darwin appeared pretty often in his sermons. He did not get very far and I have no reason to doubt that he was as firm as a rock in his faith, but he was troubled about these things; the good old fellow had something in common with me. And privately, secretly, I had a little fount of exultation. I was daring, I was adventuring, I was not as the others were. At first I seized eagerly on the liberal concessions: then, in my superiority, I had an excessive contempt for them. I cannot recall things in their right order, but I remember that, long after the

belief in eternal punishment had been condemned by thoughtful and humane people, a dignitary of the Church made a sensation by writing in what was thought to be a liberal and even revolutionary strain about it in a series of review articles. Probably my vague remembrances do him injustice, but I think the notion was that after burning a considerable time there might be some hope of the sinner receiving consideration and some kind of reinstatement in more pleasant conditions. The articles must have been opportune, for a great fuss was made about them and they were acclaimed by liberal churchmen. It was about this time that we disputed fiercely about Emily Brontë and her brother—whether, as some one had affirmed, she could indeed have acquiesced in her brother's damnation and written her verses upon it.

For a long time habit prevailed and, indeed, there did not seem to be any reason to make a definite severance at one time rather than at another. I went to church with my brother and sisters—my father was a curious kind of churchman who had ceased to go to church—and we used to teach at a Sunday School, which was called a Ragged School, and even in some fashion to expound Christianity there. Ultimately this became impossible and altruistic endeavour for some years took the form of teaching in a night school — a weary, dogged

business, a kind of penance endured without enthusiasm. There was a period, and not a short one, during which I really did not know what I believed, for there is not in the mind a separate department of belief; I could not have said whether I was a Christian or not. For a long time I had no confidant, and then I discovered that my brother and elder sister were very much in the same case as myself. After that we talked together—I think not loosely nor wildly — and strengthened one another in revolt. We got some smattering of "the greatest happiness for the greatest number" theory — Mill's *Autobiography* was a great book to us—and I remember, a queer discussion in which we maintained that in a particular case the mother should have thrown her baby to the wolves. It was mathematically clear to us that this would have been the highest virtue, and we felt vastly superior to my father and a horrified lady who could not rise so high. It was later, I think, that we tried to explain to a heavy-weight friend of my father our theory of necessity, of the impossibility of doing anything but what you had to do. I remember the preposterous scene as we stood—or some of us—with raised hands assuring him that we did not know whether we could or should strike the table, that it had been settled since the world was, but we did not know which way. And our friend

kept battering the table to show that he could do it; he thought that we were temporarily insane, for our earnestness forbade the suggestion of a joke. We were all talking together and pounding the table or ineffably refraining from it. Enticed by the verbal appropriateness—there was a time when I became an inveterate punster—I shouted "Necessity knows no law." But my brother, the logician of the family, said, "Shut up; don't be a fool." Our friend—portly, honest gentleman—tried to lure us back to sanity by showing us tricks with tumblers or wine-glasses. I broke one and hastened to explain that no blame could be attached to me; the breaking of that glass was in the constitution of the nebulous cloud from which the world evolved. So we had a recrudescence of the dispute.

Perhaps we lost something in the falling away from dogmatic religion, for I do not think there was with any of us a substitution of other forms, good or bad; we just went on without it. It was a simple and doubtless a shallow revolt against a shallow conception of something that has its elements of greatness, but it was in its way a righteous revolt. We were helpless, unguided young people with courage to exercise such reason as we had, and to us it seemed that the doctrine of Atonement implied the most shocking abomination.

It did not occur to us to take it as mystical or symbolical or in any of the ingenious ways that help to give some kind of coherence to a Church and to maintain it as an institution, an instrument, the practical means to a career. We were simple but if we missed some things I do not think we missed the point. We were crude but we were sincere, and in the Christian religion as it was presented to us there was no room for a crude sincerity. I remember going with my brother on a Sunday morning to hear Bradlaugh lecture at the Free Trade Hall. Our young niceties were perturbed by a lack of aspirates and by something ugly and ill-bred in his manners but he seemed to us very eloquent and his matter incontrovertible. He was a poser, as most of these men of the platform are, and I remember his dramatic start—leonine, I am sure, he thought it and I fancy we thought it something of the kind—when a note of dissent came from some militant Christian in the gallery. We admired Bradlaugh, and, indeed, he was a man of a strong spirit with a fundamental sincerity doing his work in the world. The liberal churchman would smile at Bradlaugh to-day and at Huxley and the rest; these iconoclasts could hardly follow him into his refuges, for the idols there are too nebulous for hammering. He has taken the institution as he found it with its Thirty-

nine Articles and its intimidating hierarchy and once inside he may do pretty much as he likes. He may symbolise harmlessly, he may moralise, he may make the Church a present of his character and ideas and so gain some credit for it. You may be strong anywhere; you may weave beautiful ideas about anything.

Doubtless we accomplished our revolt rather easily for we had no strong, reverent spirit at hand to inform the old conventions. I have known many amiable people who would quote texts, but till I knew those who never went to Church I never met anyone who wanted to talk about religion. We accomplished it too easily; there was not much to lose and we gained little. We halted; we spread out in other directions.

It is possible that we did not lose as much as we supposed through the lack of leadership. For, at times at least, we were humble enough and deplored our ignorance and aimlessness. We wanted illuminations and inspirations; we wanted them consciously. We were ill-educated at private schools such as no enlightened parents now would tolerate for their children. I never learnt anything thoroughly and have struggled all my life under an inveterately slipshod habit of mind. I've tried hard to do things properly and sometimes I've got as deep and clear as my nature

will let me, but I've been nervously afraid of the blur that comes of mental panic; sometimes I could have cried out in despair. It has not always been pure cowardice; to display an infirmity may not be just to oneself and it may be bad manners. But what am I, so ill-equipped, to pronounce on high things of the mind or deep of the soul? I believe I've lived my life on little pleasures, little encouragements; it hasn't had what nowadays they would call a great rhythm in it. Read this, my dear Rose, if you ever read it, with generosity. I try to tell the truth and it's for you. You did not bring rhythm into my life but all manner of perturbations, checks, difficulties. I suppose they're partly smoothed out now though I can re-capture many sensations freshly. You changed everything, you permeated everything but you did not bring any swelling assurance; I am to go halting and doubting to the end.

Of course, in a haphazard way we read books and it was the family custom for everyone to give everyone else a book on New Year's Day. We were not Scottish but it seems that as you get toward the Border New Year waxes and Christmas wanes. When we were young children and the books came only from my father they were almost invariably the works of A.L.O.E., a famous lady in those days, who tempered her stories with

religion or baited her religion with stories. I think some of them were pretty good in their mild way; anyhow we had no high standards then. Yet we were not wholly uncritical and sometimes we picked out morsels for particular delectation. "Tell me the worst at once; I am an Englishman and can bear all" was a family joke for years. Presently A.L.O.E. was stopped and Dickens turned on. I must have read nearly everything that Dickens wrote and most of it many times. I used to read *A Child's History of England* and rummaged out a composite book called the *Pic-nic Papers* which had something in it by the Master. I think Dickens was good for us and helped to bring some gusto into our lives, though, after a time, we experienced the intelligent youthful revulsion against him. We wanted things to be lifelike; we had no theories about artistic exaggeration (I don't think Dickens had) and he began to seem preposterous. Thackeray's urbanity and friendliness became attractive and the unstrained power of him. It seemed that he was a greater man than Dickens though not so astonishing; but to fall away from Dickens was very like a treachery. And, really, one's loyalties have so often been reducible to a stupid punctilio or even to a baser adherence to old declarations.

On the New Year's Day we liked to pile up the

books and gloat over them and their possibilities. Carlyle, Ruskin, Kingsley, George Eliot and the Brontës were reckoned sound choices; and the poets were accepted respectfully though we had nobody to tell us what poetry is. We wandered blindly, we spouted bits of rhetoric approvingly or excitedly. It was all wonderfully haphazard, for we had no experience, no principles, nothing but the instinct that follows a scent. We were baffled continually, we overheard authoritative things that we did not understand, we went about in circles, we had our foolish arrogancies and our distressful humilities. Nobody gave us a hand; we did not know a soul who cared for what we cared for. The chronology of this record is confused but I remember how we chanced on Meredith long before he was the fashion. We read all that we could find, we tried to get books that were out of print and even wrote reproachful, insulting letters to publishers for not reprinting them. For years, while we disputed among ourselves whether he was the greatest of novelists or only one among the greatest, we never met anybody who had heard of him. Later, his poetry was to become a big influence and his *Joy of Earth* became a notable qualification of such fragmentary philosophy as I picked up. It is still one of the great books of the world to me.

I believe I established my reputation with the family over Stevenson for I read *The Pavilion on the Links* which was published anonymously in *Cornhill* and raised my voice about it. And then followed *The Merry Men* and I shouted louder than before. Presently everybody was acclaiming Stevenson and I was, perhaps, a li.tle over-anxious to share the triumph. Of course after a time, we had our affectations; the young hand can hardly keep straight with Jane Austen, Borrow, Peacock or even Trollope while there is so much superfine chatter about them. I wonder sometimes whether young people read Browning now or whether they put him aside for the "Georgians" or French decadents. All honour to the Georgians — but I can't imagine youth without Browning. We weren't academic, we weren't cultured, and I remember a sort of indignant dismay when famous people whom we couldn't disregard — Rossetti was one — said that Tennyson was the greater poet. We knew little or nothing of poetry but we knew that Browning was the greater man. We were ready to argue the point, but we were all agreed. Yet, with me, Wordsworth became one of the deepest influences, though I don't know how the influence has shaped and he was never precisely a man to be championed, as some of the others were. And Shakespeare was always mighty

and the greatest of all from the days when I used to recite the speeches in my bedroom and—to the admiration of the family—give a vivid presentment of Richard awaking from ill-boding dreams. I have always had it at the back of my mind that I might have made an actor; perhaps because I have so often acted without being found out. I think I have grown simpler as I've grown older.

All this seems egotistical. A shy egoist all my life I have my chance now and, of course, I'm hinting at some sort of spiritual experiences, if not at religious ones. Generally I have been shrewd enough to keep myself dark, to affect modesty—and it has been the easier because I have so often known the moods of humility and even its bitterness—but the Ego has swelled within me nevertheless. And now whoever reads this, whether it be Rose or another, it is to be one with me; it is my turn now. Presently, I suppose I must dwindle even in this narrative for at the heart of it I am hardly a principal.

There are critical and sophisticated ways of looking at everything, I know, and I have read and partly assimilated much about Shakespeare and Wordsworth and the rest. Yet what remain with me always are the things that came freshly and thrillingly to my awakening perceptions;

critical estimates are for what came to me later. And these things are my own. I have tried to share them sometimes with friends, even with you, Rose. We have kindled together and not quite over the same thing. Our emotions have flowed like white-hot metal and I have seen your perturbation when mine had threatened to take a fresh course. You have sometimes been unjust to me; you have sometimes been incredulous of my enthusiasms. It was rare for me to betray them and I have sometimes said coldly what I had thought passionately.

I have accepted and repudiated often enough the platitudes which assure us that each of us is and must be alone. I've been alone often enough and I've had a share of sympathy and jollity. I've looked round in jovial company and thought that each one presently would have to face a quiet room and his bed and it has seemed dreadful. When I was young and had brother and sisters about me this sense of loneliness was rare and intermittent. You may be baulked of the luxury of loneliness by the want of a place to be lonely in, and I can recall the strength of my desire for a bedroom of my own at the time when I shared one with my brother. He went away and I had my desire, but this never appeared a gratification.

Brother and sisters are not the theme here. We

have moved apart, we are dispersed here and there about the world. I am a part of all and each of them even when I am most myself. We have so much in common that if I cavil at their abuses I am reckoning up my own. If I see something that I do not like in one of them I have only to turn to myself to find it again. We were not at all alike, as people go, and our oppositions and disputations were clamorous and sometimes angry, and yet in great measure we thought alike and acted alike. Now, long after our life together, I find myself referring to the old standards and even to the old instincts; nay, I can make the addition for subsequent experience or development.

We made so little practice of tenderness or affection that these have been very much submerged; comradeship, admiration, pride have been nearer the surface. Perhaps to the outsider the causes for pride would not be apparent, for there has not been any conspicuous success among us. But we have not failed; not one of us has ever been near failure. It is an arrogant claim, perhaps, and you may ask what it means. Well, we have improved on our beginnings, we have never lost hold of ourselves, we have not lost zest, we have met one another without shame, we have done the citizen's duty. They must not obtrude

here; they do not belong to this; but it is strange to think that you never knew them.

After my insufficient schooling, which culminated in Oxford or Cambridge Local Examinations —passed with moderate credit—it was necessary to find work for me and in Manchester the obvious thing is to go into the cotton trade. So I was put into a warehouse and went through various grades of drudgery beginning with the tying up of parcels and dusting. But dusting goods is one thing and brushing the floor quite another; it would have been a social degradation for me to brush the floor. Yet I had to mix on something like equal terms with those who did and in particular with one burly ruffian who initiated me into some of the simple processes of the trade. They are not worth recounting; it is an arid patch in a life that has known many. I hated it, but I had not force or rashness or initiative to break free; indeed, I did not know or care enough about anything else to do that. Commonly, my brother and I walked down to our work together and we separated at the door of my father's warehouse where he was employed. I took a narrow street at the side of it and that street must always be associated with these days. For years I never passed down it in the morning without what we call a sinking of the heart, and, indeed, this became a kind of ritual;

a particular spot, a corner, was dedicated to it. I was hardly an idealist then, and there is no room for one in a Manchester warehouse; yet I suffered agonies, not so much from drudgery and roughness of work or usage as from niceties of conscience over what seemed dubious practices and so-called customs of the trade. Some of them were trifles, and remonstrance or appeal from them seemed impossible; I have often wished that they were grosser, so as to justify revolt without incurring ridicule.

I have said that as children we were very much isolated and from one cause or another we hardly ever became quite a part of the society about us. I was fond enough of admiration and praise and craved the intimate companionship of boys who might have been willing enough to accord it. But one had the habit of shrinking from things, and presently niceties and compunctions were formidably in the way of the boyish intimacies. I shuddered away from the obscenities which seem to take the place of romance with so many boys; and at the least they make an ugly smudge on a nation's life. Of course there is nothing beautiful in mere timidities, and ignorance is a poor kind of preservative. To be brought up, as I was, in strange ignorance of sex may be nearly as bad as to become over-knowing. Yet, though better men

have early smirched themselves, have taken the bloom off their intercourse with women before romance could be strong and fine, there are times when I could have thanked Heaven that I was unpractised in these precocities. I would not use big words about it, but boys who lose their niceties and men their compunctions, part with what is precious; they kill romance with their romances. The dissolute young man, scorning caution and with caution coiled away in some ugly corner of his heart, makes his ignoble compromises. I have sometimes had his confidences, and they are not even interesting.

I approached sex timidly and blunderingly as something mysterious and deliriously exciting and I don't want all the romance to be taken out of it by a strictly scientific conception. Bill Campion —we have not got to him yet—used to ridicule me as conceiving it as something on the other side of marriage, a mystic emanation from the marriage service. And, indeed, a man must be a fool to take pride in his celibacy. We have had our attenuated struggles of sense and spirit but what great deep things we have lacked! Not to have had the greatest, the most kindly of human comradeships;—not to have had a child! What failure! What meanness! We can never justify this though we may try to draw

things fine, to reveal a spirit in things. It's delectable to have children, they say, and I believe it. Yet I've had them in common as one of the race; vastly different, I know, from the particular fatherhood. Ought I not to speak of such things? We're serious people, Rose, and why shouldn't I tell you that you would have been — that you would be — a beautiful, a wonderful mother. And yet those poor children, unborn, would not always have fallen very soft. I can see the comic aspects, and, really, you know, I did, as the ribald say, come against something pretty hard in you. Yes, I can see it as a comedy and I'm the rueful sufferer.

It was for a child that I had a sort of passion once, a harmless attachment that is all I have to show for the passion of youth. It was soon after I left the parental roof and came out to lodge in Darley, where so much of my life has been spent. At least we have Darley in common; the long lines of its hills are scored in my heart and brain. And it's a place to me of many friendlinesses and even friendships, as well as of so much more.

CHAPTER II

A WISTFUL EPISODE

I WAS never very eminent as a business man but I was trustworthy and punctual and got on pretty well with people. The firm was an old-fashioned one with a " connection " and we jogged along well enough. I'm afraid that the commerce of this country owes little to my initiative, but I succeeded in a mild way where better men fail, by virtue of such favourable chances as deaths and removals. I suppose that a great many people do their work at half-pressure (as I did) because they have deeper interests outside it. My deeper interests in men and books were obscured sometimes by the games that are so big—so excessively and absurdly big—in the lives of all but a few. I lived the life of my class, with some difference in the modulations here and there; my revolts have not often got the better of the acquiescences. It was quite in course of things that when I was twenty-two or twenty-three I should leave home and set up my modest bachelor establishment of two rooms—sometimes expanding to three—at Darley. The deciding cause was a

sort of ailment and a doctor's facile recommendation of country air. My natural scepticism would have made light of this, but the idea of living at Darley was compelling, and my sisters and brother were reconciled to it by the consideration that they could visit me there.

And so here I came and here I remain. The ten years I lived at Darley before I met Rose were the happiest of my life, if we are to take happiness as something between placidity and gaiety, without insistent questionings. For it was a quiet time and curiously quiet when one thinks that it was the time of maturing manhood. Of course I had interests and even deep ones, but they did not become formidable disturbances. I had even that love-affair; a rather strange, attenuated and yet almost poignant love-affair. I must set it down here though it is very remote now and I'm not sure that I'm free from the disposition to put off the serious part of this record.

When I first came to Darley I must have been nearly twenty-three and Rachel Carmichael ten or eleven. I was lonely, for though the society was hardly large enough for exclusions the people were not very apt to make advances, nor I, perhaps, to encourage them. My first winter at Darley was a cold one and there was a good deal of skating and tobogganning. I was a pretty good skater and on

the Dam, as the pond near the park gates was called, I made some acquaintances. One January afternoon I had got away from work early and, as the novelty of skating had worn off, the pond was nearly deserted while the afternoon was yet young. I'm better at sticking at things than some people and I wasn't tired of skating by any means; seemingly there was a little girl who wasn't, either. I didn't know her but she was rosy and jolly and attractive and I liked her to be there. It was a long time since I had spoken to a little girl and I didn't quite know how to do it. I was even resenting my isolation still, for I hardly knew anybody and the girl was hedged round invisibly by parents and friends. I saw her skate to the edge of the pond and sit down on a log there; I was afflicted with the expectation that she was going to take off her skates.

Men like me, who are modest enough on the surface and quiet and introspective, have our secrecies of insolence and elation. We are too wary to brag and strut — and, indeed, we scorn such crudities — but we can realise attitude and spectator in ourselves; we can indulge secretly an aptitude for showing off. I've sometimes set myself to charm or impress a supercilious woman, casually met, and grinned when I received the invitation to dinner which was the crown of

success. It's unlovely, and I don't like to associate unloveliness with Rachel, but it was partly coxcombry, I think, that made me resolve that she should not take her skates off yet; it would have been desolating if she had done so. I skated close to where she sat and did my best or at least my showiest. I even did a trick or two of a kind that I despised and risked a fall. It was exhilarating. I think she knew it was all directed to her; yes, I'm sure that was understood between us; and it became a perfect innocence of display. I skated off down the pond with half an eye on her and saw her hand go towards her skate. I swooped back again and twisted and twirled before her; she left her skates alone. Finally I stopped and met her admiration. She said, "I wish I could skate like that." I was kind and gratified and a little nervous. I said, "Let me teach you."

"Oh, but will you? And isn't it very hard? Am I too young? Can I skate well enough to try?"

The questions followed one another eagerly. She stood up and then rather doubtfully she said, "But I like watching you." It was a little gust of timidity, diplomatically expressed. I became rather grave and business-like and we began the attack upon the figure 3. She tumbled about a good deal and we laughed until I simulated more

sternness than I felt and said, "Now you must try seriously." She tried and fell rather heavily but she was plucky and got up to try again; she did pretty well. I commended her too warmly and she thought it was enough for that time, but I kept her to it and she became a little cross. I was vexed by her ingratitude and my feelings got into the all-women-are-alike groove. She fell again and cried and then I was horribly sorry. She would not accept my aid to the bank nor permit me to take off her skates. I think I could have cried, for I'm an emotional creature, but I took off my own skates and, when she was ready, set off with her. She was subdued but relenting and in such a mood a child is charming. I didn't give her mood free growth, though; so to speak, I pruned it; I was rather solidly didactic. I said, "You want to learn and you can't without sticking to it and grinding away."

"It's easy for you," she said.

I explained that she saw the result of a lifetime of application and introduced the case of Whistler whose happy moments had such years of devotion behind them, but she said, "What a funny name!" and began to whistle. She did it well but it was too pat and assured. She stumbled on the slippery ground and I was too late to prevent her falling; her poor little face screwed up and I had the queer,

puzzling idea that I liked children most when they were unhappy. Presently she said, "I'm very much obliged to you for teaching me," and that gave me a thrill of pleasure; it amused me, too, for it was said with a funny demureness. Then we chatted quite easily together and I was sorry when we had to part. I found it impossible to get on with my reading that night.

Rachel, then, was her name—Rachel Carmichael. It was an odd name for a fair little Englishwoman or rather Scotswoman — a fine-sounding name. I considered whether I might give her a pair of steel skates—Christmas was past, confound it!—for those old wooden skates were not good enough for her. I wondered whether her parents were poor or stingy. I began to be sorry for my loneliness and it seemed that I had a hard life before me. I felt very old. I was twenty-three and there was nothing in front but a few years of drudgery for I had no definite ambitions. It occurred to me, however, that when I was thirty-three she would be of a marriageable age—or say when I was thirty; possibly a little less. In the morning I awoke to the pattering of rain on the window and I groaned in bitterness of heart. The skating was over. I buried my head in the clothes; seldom have I felt so desolate.

Dressing rather listlessly, I caught sight of my

face in the glass and there was a difference; I had another point of view. As I shaved I continued to study it rather wistfully. I tried to rally my humour, but I couldn't help regretting that I lacked the obvious features of the romantic hero. I've never had those advantages and perhaps they don't matter. Indeed, the handsome man must play up intellectually and must subdue his manners, if he is to be forgiven his handsomeness, or so the modern woman would make him think. Is it all their affectation? They are not all alike either in their instincts or professions and some may really persuade themselves that beauty is an encroachment on their prerogative. Anyhow, I would have liked a pale brow and curling hair that morning.

My landlady was mildly surprised when I asked for an alteration in the position of the table at which I took my meals. It was not so convenient, but it gave me a better command of the road. I've always liked to look out upon a road or thought so; I'm not sure that a social being doesn't find perpetual disappointment in it. The right people come along so rarely; when you are friendly to all the world the road remains empty. I'm speaking of a country road, of course; the rattling distractions of the town are another matter. On the whole, I think I should have been happier if my

window had commanded nothing better than a blank wall.

The short winter days gave few opportunities but on a Saturday when I was home early I saw her again. I had not quite finished lunch when I caught sight of her, still some distance up the road and swaying a basket. I managed to be strolling out as she passed the gate of the little garden, and I had great joy in her shy, friendly greeting. Her basket suggested the greengrocer's, and the idea of lemons flashed upon me; I could buy some lemons. Like an old intriguer I made difficulties for myself and when to my soundings it was revealed that she was out for lump sugar and dog biscuit my invention failed. But I stuck to her side, though when we reached the greengrocer's I told her I was going to buy some lemons; it was a sort of concession to the proprieties. The grocer's was a little further on and we had parted when I surprised myself by boldly calling out that I would wait for her. She nodded and ran off and I was glad that she ran. We walked back together and I was pleased to think that she had a careful mother, for her stout boots and gaiters were appropriate to the soft, wet earth. I noticed this as I examined her covertly, wishing that I could give her something or do something for her; chocolates did not run with my mood though they would have

been better than nothing and, stupidly, I let the chance go. We passed my gate and as we mounted the hill there was a burst of sunshine through rent clouds. "See," I said and pointed to the fleeting, wintry gleam. She laughed joyfully, and it was the right greeting. Presently she said, "But the skating's gone," and, again, "What a beautiful skater you are." I was sensitive enough to detect some politeness in this and when we parted at her gate she thanked me politely for my company; I bowed, and though there was some superficial irony such as we stupidly affect in our commerce with children I was very tender and respectful really —I recall it freshly.

I continued my walk carrying the bag of lemons and pondering on her looks and tones. I knew at the dull back of things that I exaggerated the value of the episode, but I was dreadfully hungry for her friendship. I gave her virtues with lavish imagination; I wanted to help and influence her; I speculated on her future with solicitude. I could not descend to just a jolly little girl, for mood makes the difference between jolly and glorious. Yet something bright, human, easy—that was my want. I wondered whether these Carmichaels were approachable folk and what they were.

They were suspicious. They wanted to know my credentials. In the suburbs the population changes

a good deal and there is an ever-recurring danger of the wrong people. So when new ones come there is anxiety and small items of news build up a reputation. It may be a great help to have married the cousin of somebody known to be indubitably right; it is something to get your boots at the right place. The Carmichaels were among those who feared any rudeness of change and welcomed the assurance that there would be peace in their time. The social problem was solved; it was only necessary that we should continue to accept the solution, to maintain it for ever. Yet an inscrutable Providence decrees that we shall not be safe and our habits and manners, practically perfect, may be ruffled by the intrusion of " another of those wretched Radicals " who, after all, may be useful sometimes when we wish to sell a house or to obtain subscriptions. And, of course, it is true that quite good people are eccentrically attached to the Radical party.

My credentials were only middling but I paid court to Mrs. Carmichael and I fear I made the best of them; I was guilty of a casual reference to a cousin in the cricket eleven at Winchester and didn't explain that I had never seen him. She was flattered at my attentions to Rachel for when she was about they included her. I can't say that I disliked her but I think I disliked myself

when I was with her. She was a large lady with some manner of greatness and I introduced a kind of ceremonial into our relations. I think she championed me. Sometimes we reached a sort of friendliness though I believe that in the earlier stages of our acquaintance she just didn't know how to discourage me; yes, I was too clever for her. I was a little afraid all the time of Rachel's shrewdness and I remember being very much disconcerted by this on one occasion. I had incautiously talked some skimble-skamble stuff to the child in her mother's presence and was invited to justify it. It wasn't true; that was the point. I set up some defence of an imaginative truth, a consistency of idealism, but Rachel piped out, "Ah! You'll never get mamma to understand that." It was embarrassing; I think I have never been more taken aback. Our house of cards was down; it was some time before I regained confidence in pretences.

And yet, though I felt that Rachel was restricted, and that in some sense it was for me to rescue her, we were not always so inhuman together as I seem to suggest. Her mother was a mother, after all, and I think she did me some real kindness; I sound the cynical note too readily. Carmichael was a man in the ruck, but I've grown almost sentimental with him over his child; I've

seen mother and father in many phases of affection and solicitude. I've the habit of sounding and testing as I go on, and a great deal is hollow and rotten, but not all. In dismal moods I can find little in myself that is firm, but if my friendship with Rachel was not quite what it sometimes seemed to be it did strengthen me; she stood for a great deal. It was like a great passion in that the chief part seemed to be deprivations and refusals. I watched for her comings and goings, I gazed continually at an empty road. When, at night, I walked out I passed her home—unless, indeed, I wrenched myself to another direction. I suppose I loved her with an ideal purity. I tried to endow her with a clear intelligence and a fine temperament, and at times I saw her with awful distinctness as a jolly little girl. I made acquaintances among older girls, women of my own age, and got on pleasantly enough, but this was apart. It was mystical; I fed it with poetry —with Rossetti and Wordsworth, too; even with Shelley's *Epipsychidion*. She was just a jolly little girl.

I'm not doing her justice; when Rose came she disturbed my values and no recalling can correct them. It was fine of Rachel to accept an intimacy that had not the ordinary sanctions. She could not measure or understand it, but she came to me

for sympathy and encouragement. It was not all unpractical and sometimes I treated her with a great seriousness. I watched over her with tender care, I refrained from the word that would wound or perplex. Recalling it all now the beauty of it grows on me; it was fine, it was romantic, my hopes were boundless. There was a time, I think, when she was devoted to me; I was the biggest thing in her life as she was in mine. Of course we had disappointments, and sometimes we were sullen with one another and estranged. The best will in the world cannot help a little girl who is not yet ready for the Odes of Keats; the most charming of little girls may sometimes be fickle, the most delicate sometimes crude. But her friendship was once my greatest happiness and pride.

Well, it came to an end, or something like an end, by degrees. It lacked the sentimental completeness that the death of one or the other might have brought. I don't want to dwell on the period of decadence; I don't want to judge the living thing by its dead body. She went away to a boarding-school, as I knew she must, and I seemed to lose her with an incredible suddenness. To my astonishment I was discouraged from writing to her and she was not permitted to write to me or had not time or lost the inclination. It was

a polite school—for the daughters of gentlemen —but doubtless it was distracting and exciting; I put it to myself, fairly, that if I had had to go to Central Africa with an expeditionary force I should have thought less of Rachel for a time. I saw some of her letters home and their perfunctory little messages to me were something less than silence. Her mother seemed to regard them with reassurance; Rachel was becoming normal again.

Of course I looked forward to the holidays and they came at last and we were reunited; almost I could have persuaded myself that the only changes were additional interests. But I couldn't quite, and at times I felt that we were losing the savour of things in repetitions. She looked forward to returning to school, and, though reasonably I agreed that this was natural and right, I was sometimes jealous or dejected. Why dwell on it? Why explore the limbo of sentimental episodes that have lost the poignancy that justified them? Yet there was something in this one, for even now I recall the profound disappointment of it. We kept up the form of friendship and on my side there was something more. Deep in a sheltered corner of my heart and never brought out for examination was the idea of recapture; it might be that recapture would

bring a quickening, a glory. She was ceasing to be a child and presently I might discover a woman.

She was very young—not much more than nineteen, I suppose—when her engagement was announced. I hadn't suspected it, but then I wasn't seeing much of her, and Guy Massie did not often come my way. He was a pleasant, broad-shouldered young fellow, and rather a catch matrimonially. They were very young, but it was all eminently suitable. My friendship with Rachel, once a sort of institution in the place, had fallen so far into the background, that folk discussed the engagement before me without embarrassment. Yet it was a shock to me; I had to act my best to keep this secret.

I made some show of heartiness and was really disgusted at my want of sincerity; I think I justified myself with the notion that heartiness was ideal and that I should get to it presently; in the meantime I used the forms. My acquaintance with Guy was mainly a matter of meeting in games and I could laugh now at a sneaking consciousness that I could beat him at any of them. Heartiness with him was easy enough, but with her it should have been tenderness, too, and instead of that there was resentment. I don't justify myself; I was like any other

egoist. She had failed. She had not taken her chance; she had not lived up to me. I wasn't generous, for the boy was a bright, courteous fellow and they were well matched. I think that between her and me there was a sort of understanding that I was magnanimous; I think I acquiesced in this rather basely and that she accepted it rather shallowly.

I recall a scene that was strained almost to the point of fiasco when I first saw them together after their engagement had been announced. I was in the little garden in front of my rooms when they passed and we could hardly escape one another. So I tried to make the best of it and brought them in. We were all uneasy, and the demon of unrest and excess prompted me to a preposterous proposal of health-drinking. But I had nothing more flamboyant than claret and my artificial mood rejected that; I told them to wait, which they did in some embarrassment, while I ran across to the inn for a bottle of champagne. The bar there was deserted, except for a couple of stout citizens drinking porter, and I had some difficulty in getting attention. Then there was a long wait while the cellar was visited and I had plenty of time to see that I was making a fool of myself. At last I got the bottle and returned to my friends who had a disconcerting

look of patient endurance. We went into the house and I searched boisterously for a corkscrew. But a corkscrew is not a handy instrument for opening a bottle of champagne and we experienced an extraordinary difficulty in getting off the wires. At last Guy volunteered to knock off the neck of the bottle with the poker and in the mild excitement attending this feat the situation improved. The bottle was placed on a table in front of the fireplace and he seemed to think he was going to whip off the top just below the cork. He bungled it. There was a great smash and the bottle went over on to the floor. Very little champagne remained but we got some into each glass and toasted one another. We joked rather uneasily about the Borgias and powdered glass; we were what the musicians call "sharp."

It's all past. I hardly know why I recall it; but, if it is worth recalling anything, this should have some meaning as a preliminary. I've met her sometimes of late years and she's rapidly become a good, motherly creature. We are friendly enough in a disjointed, reserved way. I think she is secretly perturbed when we meet; I think she has a sense of having missed something and with her I don't feel this so much now. She's happy enough with her husband and children, I don't doubt, but already she's got to

the time of life when possessions stifle hopes. She seems older than I am, for I've more passions left; yes, Rose, I'm alive yet. Don't think that my devotion is just a habit. Rachel is in the past, but though there's nothing tangible to reproach myself with I was long haunted by a sort of remorse. We miss so much; we can't have everything and I'm one of those who want everything. I've run through it here—the episode—but when I think of it in the future I won't think of it altogether. I'll remember the beauty and freshness of it; I'll remember her as she filled the empty road and my heart lifted.

CHAPTER III

THE VICARAGE GARDEN

THIS is not to be a detailed autobiography and it is almost time to come to the point. I'm disposed to linger over quiet years at Darley; I've always been hampered by a sort of indolence that would keep me on pleasant low levels. The best chance for me is to be caught up by something strong that will hold on to something strong in me. Of course, though I stayed at home, I took something more than a polite interest in men and books and it was easy to persuade myself that I was having the spiritual adventures; so in some kind I was. The great rough world was unexplored indeed, but many dull fellows returned from running to and fro in it and could give little form or colour to what they had seen. I was indolent and supercilious; I had had easy successes, I thought myself a finer creature than those about me, being more articulate. With pleasant acquaintances, pleasant habits, a courteous demeanour, decent citizenship of the negative kind, I made my life a despicable peace. I was

non-militant but, worse than that, I was not thoroughly alive.

It did me good to know Bill Campion, for he was alive and lively too, though there was not much to be said for his citizenship. I had all sorts of formal advantages over him and some real ones; he did a great many of the wrong things and left undone the right ones. I've tried, half in earnest, to persuade him to go to church on the ground that he was the sinner and the adorer, the fluent enthusiast in emotions that could abase and exalt himself in a breath. He didn't happen to be religious, but he might have got more out of religion than your steady, conformable people who keep to the tracks. He was self-indulgent and no man is strong enough to indulge himself with impunity. And he had no habit or trick of remorse. I put it with a comic twist against myself when I say that he thought himself as good a man as I. Not always, for he could be charmingly humble without hurting himself. I'm giving my earlier impressions; he was ever so much more than I indicate here and he was never one to be strictly contained in his own character.

There was nothing more *chic* in Darley than the garden-parties at the Vicarage and yet they could not be called exclusive or sectarian. Darley,

after the manner of the suburb, was narrow and snobbish enough, but the vicarage was not a snobbish place. It had no doubts of itself; its profound arrogance was not paraded. I'm not sure that old Mr. Lydden was precisely a man of character, but with family and tradition and competence and presence he made displays of personality seem rather tricky. He was a great figure and I wouldn't call him superficial for, as far as I had penetrated, he, so to speak, realised his figure. I don't think he wanted to explore himself or anything else, and perhaps of himself there was not very much to explore; my view of him was that he was not shifty, that he might elude things but would not change. We did not go very far together but far enough for a show of cordiality. I checked myself sometimes in scorn of the Church or the churchman's doings by recalling that venerable figure. It was not quite that, perhaps, for he was a man of the world and I think that, generally, I was just afraid of being rough socially; you must not lightly condemn an institution that is housed in a beautiful and appropriate building. And there was Mrs. Lydden, too, filling her place as well as he did his and with a gentle humour that helped to placate me; they were rather pathetically childless. She was absurdly powerful in the

place with her charming manners and the Church behind them; it was all too easy for her and it would have been interesting, as the athletes say, to see her extended. I've seen her annoyed and didn't like it much; for she had no fervour and only strengthened to sharpness. Christian Science vexed her and Ritualism too. But it was a kind of loyalty; these things suggested reproach to that beautiful husband of hers who was very much her religion, I think. I recall some rather flippant talk about Christian Science and an alleged case in which a vast dose of laudanum had proved innocuous before the power of faith. I pleased the old lady by inquiring whether prussic acid would have proved more difficult and, if not, how faith would deal with a bag of nails tipped down one's throat. It was too convincing and my inveterate habit of qualifying made me suggest that faith, after all, must bear some relation to facts as we conceive them; if the victory of faith is the point it must have a better chance with laudanum than with nails. Mrs. Lydden hardly listened to this but I believe she quoted my nails with approval against the Christian Scientists. The High Church parsons annoyed her even more for they came nearer. There was one in an adjoining parish and by his standards her husband really

appeared a slacker. Services all day long and hardly a soul in the church. And visiting to the point of annoyance. And even proselytising. What was the good of it all? Who was the better for it?

She was a charming old heathen and in the proper kind of caps and laces and old brocades and with a face like an Old Master I didn't like to see her disturbed. She was perfect to the last detail; she would serve out elderberry wine in queer old cups and twinkle with a comic sense of the appropriateness of it all; for she was so far modern as to appreciate herself humorously. And the Vicarage garden had, on occasion, the "wet, bird-haunted English lawn" that was so dear to Matthew Arnold's heart. It was a restful place; one didn't want to go any further; it seemed that to adventure was to fare worse.

Happily the lawn was not wet that day I first met Rose. In a society where we are all pretty well known to one another a new figure catches the eye and though she was not at all flamboyant she was, to me, conspicuous. I don't like yielding with a rush and I did my best to keep her in her place. I liked her colouring; I did acknowledge that to myself. She was a warm, mellow creature; she suggested cornfields and butter and cream; she was full of the sun;

"summer in spring" I might have called her, for there was no cloud on her youth. If a woman may be exciting and comforting at the same time this was she; that was my first impression though many things were to overlay it. And now I must try to write of her as she appeared, to avoid wisdom after the event, to stifle the appeal.

Mrs. Lydden introduced me with something of an air and rather disconcertingly added, "You've met your match, I think." It was not quite like the old lady, who should have known that it is wrong to give people any kind of a shove at the start. Besides, I didn't know what she meant and I hadn't any retort ready. Perhaps she meant merely that Miss Avory was good at lawn-tennis for I soon discovered that. I asked her to play with me, but in the course of negotiation I lost her; it was reckoned that we should be too strong if we played together. She and Tassell, the curate, were put together and I got Gertie Blundell—Miss Avory, it appeared, was staying with the Blundells. Tassell was a hearty kind of curate and played pretty well, as curates ought to. In his way he was almost as perfect as were the Lyddens; I think they must have chosen him with great care. Miss Blundell was a pleasant, friendly little girl. I began to think better of her for having Miss Avory as a friend.

Rose she was called and she was tall and strong and blooming. She played very well and I wanted to beat her; I misjudged her strangely at first in thinking that a beating might be good for her. Tassell played up amazingly—confound him!—and my partner wasn't amiss. I took liberties in running up to the net and Miss Avory banged the ball hard and low at me. I liked the frankness of her grin when I made a mess of it and we were becoming friendly. Once Gertie gave her a very soft one and I ran up to the net, opposite to Rose, meaning to bluff her. But she hit very hard, for she could smash, and the ball caught me fairly on the nose; probably it would have gone out of court if I could have got out of the way. Her laugh came first and then commiseration and this was the right order. Her compunction deepened when my nose bled a little but Tassell was jocular about tapped claret; I pretended to be cowed by her savagery, and when I was short with a return she attributed it to weakness from loss of blood. We ran so quickly to a kind of jolly intimacy, we were all silly and happy and the tennis deteriorated. So it began.

When we broke up I managed to intercept Miss Avory and I was ever so faintly conscious of Gertie sheering off a little wistfully with the curate; Gertie and I were good friends. I was

too decisive, perhaps, in taking possession and Miss Avory cooled a little. But when I got her some tea and a plate of cakes we sat in the sun pleased with the world and with each other like wise children. Yet we could not go on doing that simply and while it was difficult to get away from the recent frivolities it was impossible to continue them. We were curious about one another but at a loss how to begin the explorations that young people find so stimulating; at least that's what I felt, for she had deep reserves. Relief came with the figure of the genial Lydden dispensing his hospitalities with quite a charming air of benediction. We agreed about him rather platitudinously and then the smugness of the whole thing oppressed me. I'm commonly a safe person, but I've had some saving rashnesses. I wanted to break that beautiful surface of which we were a part. I hardly thought of her when I said, "Look at him giving out the two loaves and five small fishes."

She was silent and perfectly still. I became intensely conscious of her. I was like a man adventuring into a strange country where anything might spring out and it is disappointing if nothing does. I don't know how I knew that I had moved her for I dare not turn to look. She sat there and said nothing whatever. Probably

she was offended and my speech now appeared by no means an inspiration. The mere amenities troubled me and, after all, I knew nothing about the girl; perhaps the emotion and the embarrassment were all on my side. It was a chance that I had said this, for I didn't know then that she was "religious"; it was a chance and yet I began to feel that I had touched something.

Lydden came beaming up to us with jovialities about my being ready to shed my blood in a good cause; he had heard of the effect of Miss Avory's prowess. I watched her while he spoke and she looked at him with a kind of severity that might have been dislike. Yet she replied lightly and her lightnesses, I saw already, were irradiating; she had come back smiling to this world. He went away and she watched him sombrely as he did the round of his guests. This was, indeed, one of his specialities; I think Lydden was conscious that he did it very well; he was easy, courteous, beneficent. I've watched him sometimes as one watches an excellent performance.

This woman intrigued me. She had touched my imagination and I was half afraid of coming to something definite. She might be anything for I was still at an age at which anything was possible. I glanced at her inscrutable profile, wishing for a moment that she would be pretty

again, but only for a moment. She was extraordinarily interesting. Yes, she was following Lydden as he moved from one to another, from group to group. We watched him together. Did I read her thoughts? It seemed to come from her for I am not one, commonly, to do bizarre and outrageous things. I was not conscious of forcing the note when I said, "He goes round washing his disciples' feet."

I don't defend it, of course. It was shocking; it outraged all the amenities; it might have been —but it wasn't—a sort of pose. Perhaps, so far as it concerned Lydden, it was paying off an old grudge; I had tired a little of hearing him called the just. Of course it was unfair to him, to her, to myself and to the pleasant circumstances. Why shouldn't the man be polite to his guests? Why should I, a guest too and a friendly one, probe or shock or mystify the poor girl? But it was a sort of inspiration. I had put it to the touch and she responded; she was perfectly direct, she was not encumbered with small resentments.

Yet she rose and looked at me, wondering and perturbed, it seemed. For long I was to be much further from her than I was at that moment. I tremble with excitement now when I recall it. She looked at me and sat down again. I said nothing for I didn't know what to say. I didn't

know what I had aroused. Then she said, gazing before her. "You feel that? You feel it?"

"It was as though she had said, "You are one of us?"—nay, "You are one with me?" It went as far as that. And what response could I make? What had my shallow perception of that scene to do with her? What did I know or care about her Christ? I had made a neat connexion between Lydden and a figure that I had borrowed from a picture; I had accomplished a fine stroke of irony. Nay, for a moment I had been with her, I had been inspired to see through her eyes. But I couldn't keep it up. I was an interloper, an impostor. I cooled to practical points. I wanted to stand well with her; I wanted to save something of this astonishing intimacy. It was a wretched explanation that I made and I haven't the heart to try and recall it, though some details of that disillusionment still haunt me with a terrible precision. "Then why did you say such things?" was unanswerable. I think she was greatly disappointed, though she spared me the obvious reproaches. They were unnecessary for she saw my discomfiture. "But you did feel it," she said, and I replied, "It was through you." She shrugged that off rather impatiently.

I have never had a hint of her version of that scene. I think I don't want to have it for there

was, on my side, something strained and artificial in it. I took a plunge, but there was nothing brave or fine about it and only luck saved it from fatuousness; certainly there was nothing to justify the lapse from good manners. I've wished often that we had begun otherwise and it's the lighter part of that afternoon I like best to recall. Presently it was tennis again and wandering among the bushes with Gertie Blundell, to whom I praised her friend with a frankness that was accepted frankly. We watched Rose as she played and she had a friendly eye on us and thanked me smilingly when I tossed her a ball. She even said good-bye to me with a sort of punctiliousness that was a sort of kindness.

I looked in on Bill Campion at his rooms that night; I think I was too much excited to stay at home. I had an ill-defined intimacy with him that was approaching friendship. At times I nearly loved him, oftener he was a stimulant, occasionally I wanted to lose sight of him. He was a little older than I and he had a competency that was increased by the proceeds of a rather languid career at the bar. He called it his career ironically for he was languid only in this essential; he could be immensely vigorous and eager in anything else. We had tremendous discussions for we were young enough to argue. With friendli-

ness and a considerable amount of conviction he called me a prig, but he placed me in company with most of those I ranked as the finer spirits. He had a genuine vein of grossness; he was unaffectedly Rabelaisian. He was saved by his instinct for art, by a charming good humour and a capacity for friendship. And the ardour of his passions shamed me. I never met a more magnanimous man or a more perverse one.

I see him in his various moods; sometimes he was like a jolly farmer and sometimes a young god, less than debonair, damaged a little but almost noble. He did a thousand kindly things and never one by rule. No man can help being moral for most of his waking life but Bill never tired of declaiming against morality. He had a terrific scorn for the combination of art with good citizenship; of course he enjoyed the humour of it when the cits insisted on supporting the artists while these winked at one another and the platitudes flew about. It was easy to confute him, or I thought so, but you couldn't disregard him. He held that the artist—particularly the artistic superman or critic—must have experiences and not just learning; it amounted sometimes to a plea for the raffish life. Of course something of the kind is common enough among young men who would not forego their humanity, but disclaim

responsibility about paving and lamplighting and keeping sober. Their natural fate is to become slaves.

Bill had not been at the rectory party. He rarely went there for he didn't quite come into Lydden's formulas. An abounding geniality carried him over almost everything but his voice boomed out; his stories were daring, he couldn't fit into that chaste picture. Lydden was always beautiful but there were times when he seemed to be beauty in distress. Bill was too much for him though he wouldn't acknowledge it and talked sometimes of him with a fatuous tolerance.

So Bill snorted when I told him what I had been doing but with sudden, undisguised interest he said, "Was that girl there?" I suppose I knew in a moment whom he meant but I fenced a little to his impatience and, indeed, his directness was more dignified than my evasion. Bill had odd bits of chivalry about him and at the best he was good enough for any woman. Ah! but he was Rabelaisian and what woman will stand that? He was frankly what so many of us are stealthily or half-heartedly or in measure. He sank into silence when I had answered some casual questions and I had a sudden pity for him. He was thinking of that girl.

It was some sort of perversity of his—I'm sure

it was not my inclination—that drew him to talk, rebelliously and yet defensively, of woman in the social scheme. I knew his old phrases of contempt for sentimentalism and he advanced them now rather doggedly. He was outrageous and I pitied him. He might have been burning his boats; he made himself out worse than he was; he talked of celibacy and chastity in a rather sickening way. It was all purely from the point of view of the individual and he was ready to listen to an argument for self-repression; it was arguable that this might be good for you. Any hint of the claims of society or of the community infuriated him and he assumed that this must be hypocritical. The philanthropist had his turn in mid-nineteenth century and certainly he was often little more than a phrasemonger. Now we are all on the watch for impertinences of didacticism. Bill Campion was nearer to sincerity than most.

He had plenty of good humour and a rough conviction that if he followed his bent all would be well. And he was kind—he was generous to anyone near him. Morally he lived as the sparrows. I don't think I really ever got his point of view; I don't think he had one. He had relied so long upon the genial sense of youth that nothing else was possible. And, I say again, he was capable of passions. Not, as he said in

humorous mockery, of passions for statistics; these were for cold creatures like me though, indeed, I had little claim to either authority or righteousness. You could not move him by a tabulation of the number of prostitutes in London and of their average length of life. I could conceive his being fantastically generous to any one of them.

We talked a long time and presently we lost the sharp edge of it. We grew more friendly as the animosities of the occasion burnt out. He called me a prig, as he always did on these occasions, but it was almost affectionately. And this was generous for, do what I would, it was impossible to avoid a sort of superiority. I had to say or imply that my theory of life was better than his and if he hadn't a theory we must touch on his practice. Before we parted he mentioned Miss Avory again and somewhat to my discomfort. I should have been angry but that I seemed to perceive a wistfulness. I think she had been in his mind all the time and I resented that—rather priggish of me, I daresay, but one has these delicacies about women. His latest point was the odd one that women love a rake; he liked to take up old-fashioned points like that and argue for them. "The kind of woman that marries a rake," he said, and, following, if without conviction, his humour I asked, "To reform him?"

He regarded me whimsically and said, "No; because she likes it." He had the advantage; he made me feel very priggish.

But I walked home in the starlight and I was truly exalted. I did not want to thank God that I was not as other men; there was nothing between me and the stars.

CHAPTER IV

REPULSE

SHE made a long stay with the Blundells and became quite one of the society of the place. I saw her pretty often both by chance and petty intrigue, but it was difficult to penetrate beyond her friendliness and I could not even persuade myself that this took on a particular quality for me. One does not succumb willingly to mere timeliness in the woman, and when—forgive my priggishness—I looked to her to justify a passion she remained unresponsive. She did not quite resolve the doubts of my colder periods and perhaps my rashness in the vicarage garden had made her cautious. She seemed sometimes to be on her guard to the point of dulness and, really, it was in her more trivial, irresponsible moments that I knew her strong and fine. Buoyancy of manner does not necessarily conceal a hair shirt but I felt more and more that she guarded something. I was baffled and happy; the adventure was alluring and it had hardly begun.

I recall a Sunday morning when, dressing with

some hesitancy, I looked out to consider the day. It did not help to a decision but, against habit and, it seemed, against will, I embarked upon a kind of Sunday best. My morning coat was a little creased but it didn't look bad and when one does go to church it is well to do it properly. As I walked there I subjected my action to a sort of superficial criticism which burked the chief factors in the case. I was not going with the crude intention of looking at her, though it was a startling gratification to find, when I was settled, that I could command her profile without much turning of the head; I wanted, so far as it was possible to me, to see some things with her eyes, to hear with her ears. Of course I fell back on the ironical, sceptical habit but I had only to glance at her to correct it. I was a little afraid of her there. She was cold, austere; it seemed that this religion of hers took the colour and glory from her. She sat, by chance, a little removed from the Blundells whose pew she shared and at first it seemed that I was looking at a marble bust. I think I resented this and I've always had a way of seeing her in contraries. "Ah! but," I said to myself, "how pretty you are, how alluring! How you can laugh and beguile! You can't hide from me like that." And when she turned sightless eyes on me I could have laughed.

When the service began I retained so much of the decencies of mental behaviour that I did not fix my mind exclusively upon her. Though I never lost her I followed, with a sort of reverence, the conduct of the service. The words of these prayers and exhortations, old and familiar, had lost the staleness of custom and came back to me in friendly, reassuring cadences. The critical habit, asserting itself, found it strange that this great tradition, founded on blood and tears, should persist in these sleepy formulas. I looked round upon the congregation and it was with a contemptuous amazement that I realised something of the general inattention and polite endurance. And then I had a curious fancy and saw myself as the devout Christian among these weary adherents; all this was more to me than to them. You may have a sort of devotion without dogmatic basis and old, forgotten emotions stirred within me. I was recalling the days of simple, thoughtless acceptance; I was the simple, callous child again. Yes, and I did yearn for a simple faith in their Christ. Theirs? He was more mine. I abased myself before a mental image, vague and shifting. I see it all now as a rather pathetic, self-conscious exercise in humility, shot with thoughts that were far from humble.

Some sort of decency or discretion prevented

me from accosting her when the service ended; indeed, I avoided her; I slunk away feeling unready and vulnerable; I didn't quite see what I was doing there and had a dim fear of her resentment. This was egoistical, of course, but in a drama of two there must be a good deal of one. I had the grace or humility sometimes to see myself as a mass of shiftinesses; a few dogmas might help to steady me. But I don't think I wanted very much to speak to her then, anyhow. I had so much to meditate upon. She intrigued me, as the saying is. That steady profile haunted me for days and I've never lost that aspect of her. A jolly, pretty girl: I insisted on that. Yet there she was, eternal and mysterious. One sees people imaginatively at first and they turn out quite pleasant. I wasn't her lover yet; I wasn't hasty and ardent; preliminaries were good.

On the way from church that day I met Bill Campion and he stared at my garb. "Oh!" he said.

"I've been to church."

"You know your own business best."

"It was rather interesting."

"She won't like it."

"Aren't you going rather far?" I said.

"Or is it for me to say that?"

I was not in the mood for definition and Bill Campion was not a man to evade by platitudes. He didn't press things—how could he?—and we sauntered together in silence. Then he said, "I'm rather like a private detective put on to a case." I shrunk a little from this and he added, "So you'd better be circumspect in your behaviour."

Rather hotly I said, "I don't like your simile."

"I've a beastly mind stored with beastly images."

I didn't contradict him and we parted coolly. And then I was sorry for him.

The lover should go straight to his point, I suppose, but I found myself evading it and going beyond it. Rose baffled me and though I felt within me something tremendous and explosive I was almost calm; the train was laid, perhaps the torch applied, but the flare-up was delayed. And yet I thought a good deal of such things as income, prospects, change of habits; I believe I had an eye open for a house that a young married couple might occupy. The force within began to trickle ridiculously into these side-issues. I experienced a curious difficulty in my attempts to draw closer. I knew that she was not shallow, but I couldn't get deep; she kept me at a distance by her friendliness, by her agree-

ments; she agreed exasperatingly. I even tried to effect an opening by flirtation—I did my best to keep it delicate—but this was a disastrous failure; it was a killing frost for a very little bud. I am no fool and her treatment of me was not a blank discouragement; presently I began to believe that it was different from that she meted out to the rest. Of course she was a person of intentions and discretions.

On a mild autumn Sunday afternoon I saw a chance and I dogged her as she set off on a walk towards the hills. When once she was committed to a direction and without a plausible refuge I made my appearance and I didn't attempt to make that too plausible. I came clattering down a stony lane and when she saw me she waited for me with—confound her!—a bright, friendly face. Soon we were back at small talk again but you can't keep that up on the hills; great waves of space and solitude were breaking over us. We began to have understandings just by looking on the same prospect; in a moment, it seemed, I was closer to her than I had ever been. I grew extraordinarily tender—I don't mean that I made love to her in any conscious way but I felt her in my voice; I had never been so happy or so far from happiness; I had never possessed so much or so little.

We sat on rough boulders, half facing one another, on the heights where the eye commands the lines of the valleys and gains a glimpse of the great plain. It is strange to feel powerful in such a place but at last I was not even impatient of delays. Our high isolation had united us. One has intuitions that are like certainties and the woman of my half-explored imaginings was before me. And then as I watched her, no longer furtively, there was a change and she roused herself to say something—I don't remember what; it doesn't matter—of the scenery. It startled me considerably; it shook my confidence; it brought me back to the region of evasions.

But it was impossible to submit to this and blood was running in my veins. She was no cold creature, she was palpitating and adorable and there we were in a snug alliance against the silences and eternities around us. They were not in opposition to me for they drove us together; she was with me away from the sheltering civilisations of the valley. I was not to be put off now. "Don't come back to views," I said; "we've got beyond views." She was drawing her skirts about her, so to speak, and she looked at me half-inquiringly, as though to say, "I don't quite understand that but it doesn't matter." Rather clumsily, for if I was strong I was a bit shaky

too, I said, "I don't get this chance every day."

She was withdrawing; she was fading away; I saw that with anger and dismay. It wasn't fancy; she had been there, she had been with me. She was getting back to stoniness and friendliness and the impenetrable barrier. She rose and indicated that she was ready to go back. I did not move. "Do sit down again," I said and then, "Sit down again, please." I think she was startled for I was not master of myself and it sounded like a nervous command. She smiled and shook her head but she was nervous too. The strings were not sounding but they were vibrating. I rose, too, for one can't sit commanding a woman, but I didn't start. And then in our agitation—if I may read her by myself—we looked about us; we did look at the view. We turned from the plain to the gaunt, windy moors and soon, it seemed, we should be steady and small in the world again. But she was there; she was thrilling and compelling; and time was flying, chances were passing. I turned to her abruptly. "It's been hard to get at you," I said. She, too, had come back with a rush; almost superciliously she said, "To get at me?"

"You repulse me. Don't you know how I've been trying to get near you? Some kind of intimacy. I don't hawk myself about commonly."

"Intimacy must come naturally," she said.

"Will you swear to let it come naturally if it will?"

"I don't think there's any occasion for swearing, Mr Fenn."

Fencing was no good. I became admirably simple. I said, "I like you very much. I try to get to know you better and you won't let me. You seem to be a frank person but you're not —not to me. Of course if you dislike me there's an end of it. I've no right to make such an appeal as this. You can be cutting or crushing and I can't complain. Yes, I can. You should not be friendly with everyone and leave me out. I ought to be more to you than the others. Yes, I'll say that."

"I thought I had been friendly."

"Friendly! Yes. It's not enough."

"You distress me. Let us go."

We set off in silence but we had hardly walked twenty yards when she stopped. She stood meditating; she walked on again; once more she stopped.

"I think it's nice of you to speak so plainly," she said. "Yes, Mr. Fenn, let us be friends." There was a little, instinctive movement of her hand and I grasped it quickly. She attempted a good handshake but I held it; I kept an unfair

advantage. Her eyes, which would have seconded her hand frankly, grew perturbed as I gazed into them; they faltered as her hand began to tug away. "Ah! you're cunning," I said; "you're clever." I felt her hand relax, I saw the alarm in her eyes before she hardened and indignantly freed herself; I had a glimpse of her spirit before it escaped. I daresay she hardly knew herself and her indignation had a sort of superficial sincerity. I exulted in my astuteness but I felt exceedingly unsafe. Perhaps I reflected then—perhaps it's only now—that a woman may cheat herself for a lifetime.

She had the temerity to ask, "Why did you say that?"

"You made a sham concession."

"Oh! And I was—you don't know how I was moved—I meant it. I meant it."

"I know you were moved. And you got out of it cleverly."

"It's not fair."

She walked on again rapidly, making for the road which wound below us, but she stopped again at a stile, which she reached with a run, and sat down on the step. As I came up she said with a little laugh, "Vexation is very exhausting."

"You're vexed with me?"

"Of course I am."

"Vexation is one of the minor emotions."

"Who's being clever now?"

"I'm giving you time to recover."

She was perturbed by this, I think, and I saw that she was faint and trembling. I could have exulted brutally but she was pathetic in her dogged little reserves. And the hunter, if he be not callous of habit, goes over to the side of the hunted. I believe I might have taken her in my arms. With a mighty and a noble fatuity we stood out for the spirit, for something elusive, fragile and precious; and we should have just hugged one another. I remember it all, I suppose, but I haven't the heart to set down what I said to her. I was conscious of a hidden obstacle, of something locked away in her; I was more conscious of her anxiety to defend herself—an anxiety that grew and sharpened as I went on refining. It was my first great repulse, after all. I think I was eloquent in a thin way and that she admired me. I think there was something wistful in her growing confidence. Why didn't I overwhelm her? She had said it was not fair and I had taken this with a futile punctiliousness. Yet what I said amounted to a declaration, which she put by. I couldn't press it then. Remember that she was physically shaken; she took refuge in that. She walked staggeringly at first. I offered to assist

her, but she would not have it. If I had—if I had insisted—— What chances we miss!

I was not dejected, for there had been nothing explicit and I felt some glow of magnanimity at her appreciation. I had been vastly considerate and to be considerate in such a case argues power. But while I might regard this as a fine beginning she, it seemed, was alarmed at these concessions and understandings even though emotions had not kept pace with them. Before we had quite reached the zone of civilisation and the proprieties she said with a strange equanimity, "Mr. Fenn, I am a Christian."

The simplicity was amazing. I had nothing to say — nothing adequate. I didn't know how to tackle the situation. Was I to say that Christianity didn't matter or that I thought rather well of it in certain aspects or that I had something better for her? What I did say, after a pause, was dreadful. It was a curious chance, a devastating inspiration. I said, "Well, here's the curate." It was witty; it was damned witty; but on what a level! I might justify it by its bitterness; in a way it was a cry of despair. The good Tassell did positively appear, reeking of parish matters in which she took a friendly interest; he joined us. Quite a good fellow, of course, and not a bigger fool than many of us.

He had the brand of affability that belongs to his kind; on the whole he was a queer representative of Christ who died on the Cross.

We walked on, jabbering about these parish matters and I took a subacid part. I was miserable. I would have manœuvred to get rid of him and then attempt some kind of botching, but I knew she would out-manœuvre me and I hadn't the heart to make an attempt. Tassell, too, had the kind of virtues that make a man what is called a sticker. He stuck and I could hardly resent it. I had had my chance and it had ended with this awful flippancy. She parted from us suddenly and casually to join Gertie Blundell, who made a small, furtive attempt to keep the party together but failed. There was no reproach discernible; of course, there wouldn't be; that was too much to hope for.

Tassell and I went off together and he talked about boys' football clubs and the state of fitness and was hearty, hearty. He thought the junior members ought to pay eighteenpence instead of a shilling, and that so they would appreciate things about half as much again. He was very much afraid of charity, which seemed to be a synonym for giving money inopportunely. He reeled off his platitudes which, I daresay, were the quintessence of the wisdom of the ages. He had

no curiosity about me; I offered him two or three platitudes in exchange for his and they satisfied him. His little world seemed to be without romance or art or economics or even humanity; he lived in the parish. Doubtless I was and am unfair. After all, I was not revealing much of myself to him. These parsons (in my small, malicious way I generalise) must see a great deal and they have the usual machinery for recording and assimilating it. They pop into cottages at odd times and they attend deathbeds. They are strangely inarticulate or, perhaps, taciturn. They have not the privilege of doubt and must meet everything with that preposterous professional assurance. There's something fine about it; they won't show their weaknesses. As to Tassell, he had a sonorous finality of speech that became exasperating; his intonations had the Church Service behind them and I am utterly unable to conceive how he would set about a tender whispering to the loved one.

I thought of asking him if he was sure that he was saved, but this would not be quite in the terms of his shibboleths; besides, having made a fool of myself on the grand scale it was not worth while to indulge the silly whim. And, really, I was getting on rather well with him. I believe I was —as he would say—making a favourable impression. I'm not insensible to any sort of kindness

or fellowship and I've hobnobbed with fools over a glass of wine with emotion. A little alcohol does help in such a matter—I don't get drunk—and perhaps one shouldn't think of one's brothers as fools. It's rather stupid, for they may be able to run the faster or to sing in tune or they have some secret efficiency that would put one to shame. This is an intimate confession and so I mustn't be judged by it; it's not my case, it's unbridled egoism. Every man is an arrogant ass.

I parted from Tassell heartily, rather liking the fellow. I don't think he felt things deeply, but he was the sort that would die in a fine, stupid way for his convictions. I like an ultimate stupidity of holding on; I like the public school spirit and even, sometimes, its ridiculous distinctions and irrelevancies; I like the *panache* of it. And Tassell was a clean, handsome boy. Gracious heavens! Yes, she might marry him. Seriously, she might marry him. One had heard of the great actress marrying her manager, of the distinguished novelist choosing a mild, handy creature who would attend to publishers and the penwipers; it was a kind of haunting joke. She couldn't do that; or could she? She must take marriage nobly; she could hardly conceive it, as some women do, in terms of motherhood. And yet, in that Christian religion of theirs, what is Joseph, the

husband of Mary? The typical mother of the ages is conceived as pure motherhood; I could never make much of that stuff about the Holy Ghost, but it does serve to emphasise this. Ah, Rose! would it distress you to read this? But remember that I wouldn't speak so of Christ; he speaks to me in Tolstoy and Ruskin and the great spirits; he's the mystery, not that pseudo-fairy tale of an Immaculate Conception. It mustn't be proved, just as any other fairy tale mustn't, and it's a great story if you'll leave it at that and not make it part of a scheme to guide my life. It's then that it becomes rubbish, like the Atonement and all these misused symbols that you would isolate and make better than anybody else's symbols. It's really British, it's Imperialistic, it's that inveterate notion of the Chosen Race. Poor girl! I'm capable of resentments even now. Why couldn't you be reasonable and amenable, natural as I conceived nature and human as I conceived humanity? Why couldn't you be content with a balanced, well-organised life instead of cultivating one patch with such frightful intensity? I sat that night resolutely and ineffectually trying to read a great critical book, a noble tome that demanded all my faculties and more. My mind would switch off to the afternoon's scenes, to a futile rehearsal of what she and I had said and done. I saw her

maddeningly attractive, with a sort of demureness that should have been crumpled up in the old manly fashion. I was a timid, tentative creature; afraid of my own ruthlessness, afraid of injuring something noble and mysterious. And, after all, the woman was a sort of fanatic. I must write of her and not to her. From now onwards I renounce the direct appeal. If I am to keep a balance in this narrative there must be no more of the vocative.

I returned to my book, but the large sanity of it couldn't help me, because I failed to connect its detail with any plan; my mind at the best clung despairingly to some point which in itself hardly mattered. And then, suddenly, a sentence stood out and I read it again and again. It was illuminating, like those texts selected by the thumbs of the pious in their extremity; it was like cutting for aces and finding one. I read: "The Methodists are always desirous of making men more religious than it is possible, from the constitution of human nature, to make them." That was it. She was an unbalanced creature and now I had the formula that might confound her. The large critical view put her in her place.

And then I perceived that I was making a mistake. The sentence was quoted from Sydney Smith as an example of a prosaic soundness that was very far from engaging the complete sym-

pathies of the critic. It was placed in ironical comparison with the "alleged epitaph upon the churchman 'whose glory it was to have been a lifelong enemy of all forms of enthusiasm.'" Sanity is not the perfect order; it is only the assurance which gives us courage for high flights. To be sane on the low levels is too easy; and madness lies that way as well as in any other. I was stung by the romance of it all; it must have been vastly romantic to love a nun. But then the nuns were women behind material bars; it is another matter when they are unapproachable in their liberty. Already, you see, I had begun to idealise our relation furiously. I took many things for granted, I assumed, I divined, I plucked for the heart of it. And I was right; it didn't all dissipate; I had the lover's vision. I was baffled, but a tremendous force was working in me.

CHAPTER V

SEEKING IS NOT FINDING

BILL CAMPION seemed a fantastically unlikely confidant, but he was the only possible one. I don't think I wanted to be confidential, but I did want him to throw some light. I was sometimes timid in his company, for he would say the plain things that I hid away and, at the most, would have hinted at discreetly and in the best of taste. "Thank God," he said, "I've got a beastly mind;" he could be ribald and understanding too. He could burn with a fierce, pure light or flicker and sputter noisomely. Yes, I used to revolt against him. I've thought of sending him savage denunciatory letters—and never sent one. It's strange that I should want to talk to him about her. Oh, public school spirit! Oh, niceties and petty nobilities! He was good company for a prig.

But Bill was extraordinary careful in speaking of her; she might have heard most of what he said positively and directly about her. He had a precious little deposit of that public school

spirit himself, a core of sentimentalism or of essential justness—I don't quite know which. Of course he required the idea of the nun to set off the flaming figure of the courtesan; he liked extremes, he liked melodrama, he had not much use for the middle way. It was not all blare and bathos, he could bellow an appeal to the mind, he was capable of a passion for technique. We dined together in Manchester one night, intending to go to the play and never got there, and we talked and talked, passing through many phases of intimacy and repulsion. We dined a little too well, or I thought so in my churlish mood; not swinishly but with the amateur's fuss over the sauce and service. He carried his first-rateness everywhere, and I would have protested against the rare hock of whose existence neither the waiter nor, it seemed, the wine list was aware. We got so first-rate, indeed, that he declined to face the middling play and the middling actors. He lectured me on the technique of French acting and expatiated on the magnificent things that this had accomplished. It appeared that a French actor, sitting on a chair well down the stage, would incline his instep downwards a little because otherwise he would present the sole of his boot to the stalls and so give a false and an unfavourable impression. We discussed the possibility of the wrong foreshortening

from the point of view of the gallery, but it seemed that in some way—I forget exactly how—genius could get over that. He talked of these things passionately, and I do not say he was wrong.

I could never take respectfully his theory or conviction that the French actress excelled by virtue of her contempt for morals—perhaps it was Bill who supplied the contempt and they did not bother much about it at all. I think that in some things he was more French than the French and yet he could be tremendously British in sentiment. I grew languid over his theories of art and so he flagged too. Now he was conceiving every one —or every one who mattered—as an artist, and suddenly, strangely, I perceived that she had come into our minds. It was to some general denial of mine that he answered, "She's a great artist in her own line." I shook my head at him, I excluded him. I said, "She's part of what you despise." He sank into thought with some humble expression of doubt. I think he said, "Is she?" very simply. He had a deep, unresolved obsession. Presently he said, "I can believe in her living a particular kind of life superlatively well. Isn't that to be an artist?"

I said, "It isn't designed."

"It's chosen. It's shaped."

"Is it a line of parts?"

"Why not one part?"

"She's set and fixed," I said bitterly. "She's got dogmas."

He looked curiously at me: "There's a great gulf fixed."

"You mean——"

"Between us."

"Us?"

"You and me—her."

"Are we together? You and I?"

"For practical purposes"

And then he began to torment me. He asked me whether I ever read the Bible, and developed one of his enthusiasms. "You're fixed, too," he said. "Now, I'm the man to cross a gulf. I can float over it or leap or cross on a rainbow." He horrified me by talking of Christ very much in the way he would talk of a French actress; my innate Puritanism revolted. He was not at his best; it was a temporary lapse from sincerity. I think now that there was a bitter, desolate heart to this. He made melodrama of the New Testament and yet he spoke of the story with an extraordinary and mysterious exultation. I think the obscure passion welled up in him, colouring this exposition; it was she between us that excited him. In the light of this my confidences, actual or proposed, seemed a frigid piece of fatuity.

I had a glimpse of him as a great artist tolerating me and using me. It was an injustice to his friendship, but I was a little alarmed and vaguely jealous. We were going too fast and too far, but he pulled up suddenly. "We're fools," he said. "What are we eating? I forget the last course. These are not topics for dinner; they come later. We're getting too much emotion into it. Let's have more brain. Call yourself a man of wit!" He insisted on a bottle of champagne.

Before it came he said, "Perhaps if you were very careful and circumspect and insidious you might sap her faith. It's all superstition, you know. When she's weak and desperate you might have a chance."

As I glared at him his eyes refused to accept the challenge; they fell before mine, and not abjectly but wearily. He carried it on without zest. "Bring her to your own enlightened frame of mind," he said. "It's a duty."

The strange thing was that we both assumed so much about her. She had been reticent enough, but we seemed to have no doubts and hardly differences about what was fundamental in her; of course we didn't know its qualities. She was like a wall round a mysterious garden, or perhaps a mere oubliette. But Miss Avory had a reputation; she was a mystery but a conspicuous one;

she did and said things that were entirely unlike those done or said by other people. She was orthodox, I suppose, but orthodoxy was no limitation to her; in some directions Christianity has no limits. We had begun to know her as passionately humane, for though only a visitor to the village she had plunged into its life, she knew its people, she befriended, she solaced. Perhaps this was resented slightly by the official philanthropists, but she was extraordinarily clever in avoiding offence; she was considered eccentric but quite a good sort. As Bill said, she hawked the Bible quite jollily, but indeed she was not a pushing person. We knew so much, though we were not positively in touch with her ministrations. She seemed to be taking the place under her wing, but she had cunning little humilities with which to placate people, and "why doesn't she mind her own business?" was not said or rarely said and then indulgently. Lydden was a miracle of tactful acquiescence; his indolence was expressed in terms of grace. And all her doings came in as part of "helping Gertie," who was ready enough to be helped to extinction. Once Rose had helped to control a drunken labourer who wanted to fire his home and we heard various reports as to how she had got the thing in hand. Anyhow, the episode had terminated with Rose

reading the Bible to the man; she read him to sleep.

Bill and I had a period of rather heavy reflection before the champagne appeared, and though we soon responded to its influence the response had at first something of custom, intention, endeavour. They prevailed and we lived for the moment well enough, within the envelopment of the deeper things; perhaps they stimulated the mood of gay friendliness. We were jovial and we felt witty, we enjoyed ourselves and each other, we were even sentimental. Bill rallied me as a Galahad making liberal concessions, I him as a Gargantua coming to the conviction that there was something in the spiritual life. It was an old joke between us and we took up our parts briskly, extravagantly. We behaved ourselves decently but our gestures became ample and our laughter unrestrained. I was checked by the consciousness that others in the restaurant were watching us. It threw me back on myself, but I took some colour from the assumed caricature. I could rise to the occasion, perhaps, but beside Bill I was a precisian. We conceive our Galahads in their moments of exaltation; but think of their stolid years of service, their dull confinement in the routine, their stupid jogging on the straight and narrow way! Bill soared away from my trivial chastities—"economically sound,"

he would call them—and I envied his freedom of spirit. He grew broader and more genial and I toiled in his wake.

It was a great evening, unplanned, unrehearsed, and I won't ask now what share alcohol had in it. We had a hansom to the station and caught the last train easily by something less than a second; we had a large toleration for circumstances and, presently, for our fellow-travellers. It was a non-smoking carriage and I could admire the affability with which Bill imposed his large cigar upon it. His main plea, advanced with well-bred simplicity, was that it had cost half-a-crown and that he was a comparatively poor man who rarely gave himself a treat. He was moderately hilarious and he began to impose his mood on cold people who might have been attending lectures or organ recitals. If his was not the milk of human kindness, it was an astonishingly good substitute. I was not even second fiddle to him; at the most a tinkling triangle almost outside the scope of his triumphant orchestration. He did it splendidly, and I was humble in admiration. It was a third-class carriage and there was about him the kind of abundance that wants a train to itself, but somehow he identified himself with his surroundings and placed us all on his level. I don't know what he talked about, but he turned hostility to

friendship in the course of half an hour. He was almost lovable—would have been quite so, indeed, but that I had dimly the vision of him jocularly or critically outside this; perhaps this was as much his true self as the other. He parted as from friends.

The night struck sharply on him as it did on me. We didn't talk much as we walked home. I think we were both a little shamefaced before the stars. "Sleep where you dine," I heard him mutter. We were parting with "good-nights" when he said suddenly, rather loudly, "Shake hands." I was glad of it, but it was rather sentimental.

I don't like going to bed immediately after coming in from even the mildest carouse; I like to steady myself if it's only with a newspaper. That night as I scrutinised my bookshelves, hesitating between *David Copperfield* and *The Wrecker*—it's wonderfully difficult to choose a book for a half-hour read—I became conscious of a strange hiatus in my library. I had not a Bible. Great heavens! Not a Bible! My old one had disappeared and, as I could not guess how and why, I played with the whimsical notion that it had disappeared miraculously; I regretted that Bill was not there to appreciate the fancy. I had certainly not given it away or lent it, I've

always conformed to the respectfulness of literary agnostics for the great book, and the particular volume had personal, sentimental associations. It had gone and I couldn't remember when I had missed it. I was annoyed, I was in a false position. Not to have a Bible appeared the kind of affectation for which I had a healthy contempt; it recalled that of the silly young bloods of literature who haven't a Shakespeare. And, then, I wanted to look at the Bible.

I tried *David Copperfield* and turned to the big scene of Uriah Heep's unmasking, which always gives me a childish pleasure; Dickens provides harmless objects for us to hate and scorn and our evil passions dribble away upon them. I read without satisfaction and Micawber's speeches appeared rather long; I skipped several of them. And it seemed to me that I was wasting time and opportunity, good excitement and exaltation. It was the Bible that I wanted. Where could I find a Bible?

Mrs. Gee would have one, of course. I was not sure about her piety, but she was very respectable. I lit my bedroom candle and went into the kitchen.

It was snug and close there, though the fire had died down, and there was a pleasant odour of newly-baked bread. It was long since I had been in this room and I looked about me with curiosity.

I was not quite easy in my mind, for I was spying upon the old woman; I could hardly justify my presence there. It was a compact little life she led and it seemed that it was all here. And it came upon me with tremendous force—as it does when some one we know dies—that I had neglected her. I had taken the poor, kind old thing for granted; I had been just polite. There was a basket with my socks in it which she had been darning, a pair of my boots was drying in the fender, the bright pans and the plates ranged here so neatly waited for me, the bread I smelt was baked for me. I was an immense part of her life and she was an unregarded figure in mine; it was all greatly pathetic and reproachful. And here, indeed, was a little framed photograph of me; a casual, trifling thing that I had forgotten; I didn't even remember giving it to her. You may say all this was sentimental, but it was not; I felt it deeply, it was a precious revelation.

Of course Mrs. Gee had her habits like the rest of us and I was a great part of hers. Even Rose Avory had her habits; she had her habits of prayer, she approached Christ habitually. Yes, and as this old woman worked for me and thought of me, to whom she was nothing, so Rose worked and imagined with a figure always in her heart; a figure compounded of her own imaginings and

glimpses and fragments of those of others; beginning, centuries ago, with a man whose dust is unconscious of all the aspirations that centre in his name. What does it matter if the service and the aspirations are true? And what does it matter now if this parallel was extravagant? I wasn't in a timorous mood, and my thoughts, if not their order, have endured.

There, in a nook on the window-sill behind the raised back of the dresser, was what I sought. The Bible was there and everything was in order, for Mrs. Gee's spectacle case rested on it, just as it ought to have done. It was I that violated the conventions and, indeed, I did not find it easy to remove the spectacles. Possibly this was merely their resting-place, but they seemed to betoken possession. It was a slight outrage to remove them and I took the Bible away with apprehension; Mrs. Gee might come down for something and discover that it was gone. I was startled by the cat running out of the shadow, but she rubbed against my legs reassuringly; Mrs. Gee's representative did not resent my intrusion. The cat got out of the kitchen and my efforts to coax it back did not succeed. I stalked it, I searched for it with great precaution; with chagrin I saw it bolt upstairs. I dare not follow and I was uneasy at the prospect of explanations, for Mrs. Gee's sense

of mystery might be aroused by the problem of her cat ranging the house after having been shut up. I took the Bible to my sitting-room and gently closed the door.

The literary, the liberal outsiders pay handsomely in lip-service to the Bible. The intellectual revolt was accomplished long ago and now there is an amiable reaction in favour of its diction, its dramatic power, its stores of helpful wisdom, its moral beauty. Yet I began to read in a mood that was partly frigid and incredulous, though not without humility. To become as a little child is more than a taking formula; it is the great refreshment of the spirit. And I was to see with her eyes, this was to bring me closer to her. It should have exalted me and I think it did, but yet, despairingly, I was aware of my old sceptical, inflexible self, not to be cheated, not to be suppressed; submerged but certain to revolt from any sentimental compromise.

I read coldly through the generations in the first chapter of Matthew, I brushed aside the Immaculate Conception with some dim notion that here was a prototype of many whose instinct for motherhood has lacked such glorification. Those who read the Bible with pious acceptance of the facts or even of the perfect symbol can hardly realise the freshness of curiosity that is roused by a

sceptical approach. What, really, was the sequence and character of events? Here were hints and fragments of history and an impossible figure forming through the garbled reports. What sort of a charlatan was he or how was charlatanism thrust upon him? There is too much of this childish talk of raising the dead, of stilling tempests, of making water into wine. Perhaps he believed in these things, perhaps the symbolism of the Christianity of to-day is a return to the spirit of this symbolist condemned to realism by child-like followers. But the revilings and persecutions are real and out of these he made a great philosophy. Some fragments of his wisdom left me cold and hardly curious; he was certainly a man of wit, though this is overlaid with our solemnities and perhaps with his. The amazing thing is his gospel of meekness, his standard of meekness beside which fiery, positive action grows pale. The case for humility is enormously overstated. It is an arrogant overstatement; perhaps it was opportune. His casual utterances have become the world's laws. Like all great men he was a man of moods and seems to contradict himself. "Let your light so shine before men," he says, and "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men." To the young man of great possessions he did not say "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

I suppose he would subscribe to "Honour thy father and thy mother," and yet it seems that Christ is the great enemy of the family. And some queer misreadings would make him into a God of Battles; they bless banners in his name.

He was strong on both sides, he was sane, and perhaps the Christians who worship him now are sane too. They take a certain amount of thought for the morrow and though they have not abandoned their possessions neither have they perceived any cause to go away sorrowful. Plainly, such things are not practical politics and it is only polite to assume that they are translated into the spirit. I could not find the Christians I knew in this Christ. Could I find her?

Through all the meekness and through the kindly, reverent tradition break the tremendous arrogancies. "Not peace but a sword," he said, and "Let the dead bury their dead"; and there are cruel, remorseless things about Sodom and Gomorrha. I suppose he was a man who took things hard and was capable of rashnesses. The record has acquired, by rubbing and sifting perhaps, a sort of discretion, but one may suspect that all is not there and that some joy has gone out of it. It has been whittled away. There must have been precious and personal things, unfitting to a God, which those stupid disciples and

recorders have omitted. We want irrelevant kindlinesses—a drink to a child, a word to a beggar; he could not have done all these things pointedly. It is an awfully austere record. Christ and his disciples travelled together familiarly. Did they take no pleasure in it? Did they never sing or laugh or joke? The custom of joking has grown with the ages, but man has never been without some rudiments of humour. Why don't they tell us more of Christ when John the Baptist was killed and he fled into that desert place. Was he terrified? Was it a politic movement? Was it the withdrawal of a man who had lost his friend?

We are to take it as a record of essentials, but the principal thing is missing: the joy of earth. We are to wait for earth until we get to heaven? This is a vast stupidity that our hedonist churchgoers have managed to avoid. The queer thing is the half-acceptance, the muddled instinct to make the best of both worlds. And so these modern liberal people would symbolise it all and make their sacramental bread and wine the symbol, not of positive, quivering flesh and streaming blood, but of another symbol, the Christ of the Ages. But behind that there was once a poor wretch veritably stretched on the Cross, with no miraculous interventions and uttering other cries besides the sonorous lamentations that have come

down to us. In my reverie on this splendid, astounding story I lost count of her. You cannot make the death of Christ a circumstance of your own love affair.

She had penetrated to something that I could not reach. I tried, and I came to words—mystical and the like. The story was splendid, dramatic; it gave me high excitement. But I could go no further. I could only create God in my own image. And I was humble, humble. I am humble. I am ready to follow but I cannot face treachery. To immolate myself, to stifle myself would be that. What can her Christ be but mine—something compounded of rumours and oneself? She cares nothing for the higher Biblical criticism. It is oneself that matters; it is what dwells at the heart. Her vision is what she finds there. Is it an accretion of all her fancies and aspirations? Has she made it to worship it, fearing to relinquish that great possession? I had never thought of her as perfect, but she could not be cowardly.

I had read far into the night and my excitement failed me. In the swelling moment everything was possible; even a high union of passionate sympathies. Now—I got up and stretched myself, I pulled asunder the curtains and confronted the chill, disenchanting dawn. I was as far away from her as ever. What was it to her that I had been

a spectator at a Passion play? I was cold and stiff and weary. I extinguished the lamp and it seemed that the last of the illusions went with it; daylight had been creeping near and now sprang suddenly upon me.

I took up the Bible and carried it back to the kitchen with the precautions of a thief. I put it in the corner again and replaced Mrs. Gee's spectacles upon it. The smell of bread was there still and slightly reassuring. As I went out a dark shadow flitted past my feet and I had the satisfaction of shutting the door upon the cat. Then I dragged myself to bed.

CHAPTER VI

CONFESSIONAL

A FEW nights afterwards I sat with Bill Campion in his room, and we talked about the Bible. I did not find it difficult to work the conversation round to the subject and I saw why when he eyed me sharply and said, "You've been mugging it up, too?" This was surprising and even alarming, but it seemed to me that Bill was no nearer to the heart of the thing—of anything—than I was. We talked of the Bible intelligently and reasonably and we talked of it with an expansive enthusiasm; it was very much as we might have talked about the Elizabethans. We found it a good subject, but all the time there was a hidden qualification. If we had not been so very tender about that we might not have agreed so well. "Yes," I would say, "even in the New Testament there's something menacing and implacable; it's a mercy that does not endure for ever." And Bill said that if you are angry and rhetorical you must have an outer darkness. We agreed that Christ spoke of the chief priests and scribes and

elders very much as labour leaders speak of Cabinet Ministers to-day. "Of course," Bill said, "his diction was better." I was curious and I was insecure; I didn't altogether like discussing the Bible with Bill, for it was not natural to me even now to regard it just as history or literature. Vestiges of an old reverence had faded into timidity, and this contended with a resentment that was due not to the book but to its interpreters.

I began to perceive that Bill was uneasy and distracted; he had not appeared so at first, but I realised that a big personal thing had come across the abstract discussion. He got out a cigar with a rather hearty air of ending that part of our talk, and then he began to fumble with the matches. He was nervously preparing to say something, and, turning to me suddenly, he began, "Do you think——" He turned away to strike a match and I waited while he pulled and puffed and over-lighted his cigar. "Do you think," he began again and paused as though careful phrasing was necessary, "that there's a guide to conduct there?" I didn't help him and, indeed, I couldn't, for I was wondering what he would be at. "Does it still hold good, I mean;" and he spoke with a trace of irritation as though I had missed an easy point. "Does it help in a practical way?"

He gazed at me with a sort of severity that was only a mask and I felt that I was unresponsive; he wanted to be met and I didn't know which line he was on, for Bill on questions of conduct was disconcerting. "You're too general," I said; "I suppose it might help in a hundred ways and not in a particular way." He listened impatiently to this. "Take you and me," he said; "if we were in a mess can you conceive our going to the Bible?" I could only say, "Perhaps it depends on the sort of mess."

"You would go to it for some things?"

"Well, I haven't the habit. Of course there's lots of wisdom. If you want aphorisms——"

"Aphorisms be damned. Can you conceive a case in which Christ would help you?"

I paused again at this and then with a partial illumination I said, "Or a Christian?"

"What d'you mean by that?"

"A Christian might help you."

He understood but he said, "Why dilute it? Why is a Christian better than Christ?"

"The dilution might be the stronger element."

"Roundabout way of talking," he sneered.

"Who began it?"

He went into his shell suddenly, but I knew that this was not the end. He burst out again, "The Christian is here and now. Has he—has

she "—he corrected himself defiantly—"not got the spirit of the thing? And the local situation, too? You don't expect me to go chasing round for texts that apply?"

This was not very logical, but I didn't quarrel with it. "Fenn," he said, "there are times in a man's life when he should go to the best woman he knows and make a clean breast of it. Christianity isn't the point—and yet a Christian woman's good. They have their dogmas and you want something hard. Woman-of-the-world, best-quality stuff isn't the thing. I'm ready to believe in sin and repentance and the rest of it."

"You've gone to her?"

He wasn't ready for that. I think he had some idea of getting things out in order and yet he was full of emotion. He tried again. "Every man has silly, stupid, villainous habits. They're part of him and just as much part of his class and his kind. And then he does something a trifle outside and wrecks himself. Fenn, I've had a little folly on my own account. The usual thing. If it isn't a habit it's the usual thing. Your habits prepare you for the particular business just outside them."

"You'd better tell me what it is," I said, and just then I felt cold towards him. He had an enormous difficulty in getting it out. Afterwards I saw that, having made a confidant of her, this

difficulty with me was natural. He really wanted help; he wanted my help, too; but he couldn't put it to me just as he had done to her. So to speak, the planes of emotion were different and yet he couldn't very well subtract from what he had said to her by putting it quite differently to me. He wanted to be sincere, but he wasn't thoroughly sincere and so he was troubled.

He didn't get on and I cast about in my mind. Folly? The usual thing? I got up from my chair suddenly and then I took the edge from the action by groping on the mantelpiece for the matches. I turned to him, "You don't mean——"

A girl's name was on my lips but I stopped; there is great virtue in refraining from a name. But small, unregarded things crowded upon me. I recalled the occasion when a casual encounter with her had started Bill and me on a discussion. It began with a small point in manners; the kind and degree of the bow to village girls. As connoisseurs we agreed that deliberate distinctions were snobbish, and yet the effusive courtesy of the bow to girls of our own middle class could only be accomplished against the grain when we met housemaids whom we knew. We agreed then in abolishing classes and trusting to instinct, but instinct, it seemed, reasserted the classes. Something was wrong; our customs were wrong because

we were. And then Bill had blurted out, "You can't do it; they'd think you were after 'em."

It was Jessie Bland, a fair slip of a girl who flitted brightly about the village. Everybody knew her. She sang at the concerts, I think she taught at the Sunday School, she went out to wait at dinner-parties; her chief occupation, as I understood vaguely, was millinery. She lived with an old mother and probably supported her or helped to. She wasn't noble or big or important to anybody but herself and her mother, but she was a pretty, merry creature; slightly, pleasantly stimulating. Of course she wasn't at all the kind that you could make into a duchess with a few lessons, she was probably very rigid in her kind as these bright, assertive people are. And then, as I stood looking down on Bill gloomily smoking, I remembered, or thought I remembered, that when I saw her last she was less buoyant, a little dashed, a little sad, less responsive to my greeting. I looked down on Bill sternly, hating and scorning him. The abominable cruelty of it was so flagrant now. I experienced a great revulsion which took me back to the refuge of old, simple, narrow standards. Good was good and bad was bad, and we were children with commandments that sufficed. Now I was out in a shifting world with people like Bill in it. It was a world vastly more interesting,

greater, nobler than that which would just shun him as a wicked man. The other gave the illusion of safety and peace.

I said a bitter thing to him; I said, "Is it your idea of romance?" He didn't reply to that at once. He said, "Don't think I'm coming to you for any kind of sympathy. I want a little hard-headed advice." I don't think this was true. I think he was feeling very bad and wanted me to give some kind of comfort. The desire to denounce was strong in me and I did say some obvious things to which he submitted quietly. I think that saying them was very much my self-indulgence; I was not helping him or any one. He interrupted me at last. "You're mistaken there," he said. "It was not a pursuit—not as you mean it. I'm not so base as you think. A muddy kind of romance, I grant you. Fenn, are you ever bored? Do you know what it is to be bored profoundly? With the most exciting thing in life at your elbow? I respect fellows like you. Oh, yes! you're amazing. And what's the difference between a saint and a sinner? Just a penn'orth of ice somewhere in your composition. All your frigid virtues hang on this. Well, I was infernally dull one day and this girl was about. Harmless that time. Yes, but I was infernally dull another day. I suppose you don't understand.

It's clean against my principles. Oh! I have principles in these matters. Do you know, Fenn, that there are times when you strike me as a dull dog? Well, what's to be done?"

"You've asked advice—of somebody else?"

He hesitated, but he said, "Yes, I've written to her."

"To—Miss Avory?"

"How does that strike you?"

"It's original."

"Come, come, Fenn; you're not on the right lines. If you want to make cheap scores off me you can. You ought to be above it."

He was right, but I held back a flood of resentment and I couldn't stop the trickles. I said, "Have you a clear notion of why you wrote to her?"

"I simply wanted help."

"Or was it that you were infernally bored again?"

"You suggest——"

"Stop," I said in alarm. "I suggest that what you were after was—well—a kind of spiritual excitement. Besides, if she had to know it was clever to tell her."

"You're jealous," he said. "You're wishing you had something interesting to tell her. Something not quite so bad as this."

"I'm not far wrong then?"

"Of course you're wrong. You've no simplicity. Fenn, I wanted to see the whole thing in the eyes of a good woman. I'm sincere enough. I'm more than half sincere. What! you'll accuse me next of running the whole thing in order to get at her. I wrote to her because I was so miserable that I must do something."

"And why do you come to me?"

"I'm a gossip, I suppose. No; I tell you I'm more than half sincere. I've always thought you were no fool. I thought you might tell me what to do—clear the thing by talking, you know."

I was sorry for him then, for I perceived that he was tremulous; his voice was not quite natural. And the poor devil was in a mess. That tentative jealousy of mine was ignoble; I was jealous of his approaches to her, but, after all, he had dished himself most shockingly. If from the ruin of his chances and hopes he could gather some little compensation in emotions why should I object? Yet to see Bill as pathetic stiffened me. I had no right to see him so; in mere decency I stiffened.

And then the most amazing thing happened; I saw it first in Bill's face. I remembered afterwards, though I had not marked it at the time, that there was a ring at the doorbell; I grew conscious of voices in the passage; as I spoke to

him his attention was diverted. We stared at one another, but as my words faltered out I saw eagerness in his eyes and apprehension on his face. The door opened as I turned and Rose was with us.

I learnt afterwards that she had hesitated on hearing that I was there and then determined to come in. She entered with a little assumption of effrontery; she was not a calm, majestic figure, but a timid girl, trying to pull herself together. I think we were both immensely conscious of her courage and her charm. Bill was having his emotions and so was I. She looked smaller and frailer than usual. I had tears in my eyes and looked away from her, following her gaze round the room, for she stood there looking about her as though she sought means of escape. The door had closed behind her and we all stood silent for quite a time. Bill's voice sounded rough when he asked her to sit down. She sat on the chair he indicated and her head declined; I was startled to perceive that she was praying.

Bill was very shaky now and when I made a movement as though I would go he laid a hand on my arm. I think he had a momentary fear of being left alone with her. He said, "Must Fenn go?" I had felt it to be impossible for me to remain, but now that it was so suggested I dreaded the answer that might take me away from this into

an empty night of suspense and surmise. But she looked up at me and said, "Let him stay."

And there we sat and began to discuss the matter quietly and with a good appearance of calmness. I had not seen Bill's letter and so did not know what were, so to speak, the terms of the reference, but it appeared that he had spoken of marrying the girl. He was worked up for a sacrifice or had been; now, in Rose's presence, the sacrifice might seem intolerable and yet alluring; it was a tremendous opportunity for display, and Bill, like the rest of us, and more than most, had a histrionic side. He was nervous and once or twice he became a little rhetorical. She was uneasy at this, I fancied, and suggested practical points for his consideration. Bill edged off the ways and means, but he had some reassuring generalities and put them in quite good-humouredly. It appeared sometimes that she was the drag on the wheel, that she was caution and worldliness dissuading the hero from his heroism. The heroism was modestly discounted, for Bill suggested that the happy marriages were those in which one of the parties occupied an inferior position. He phrased it nicely; if the girl had been there she could hardly have taken offence at what he said. "Affection, certainly," said Bill, but a wife should be outside

a man's passions. He gave historical examples of success.

The situation had taken a curiously comic twist, though deep seriousness was implicit in it. I think Bill had all sorts of motives or impulses and that one was to reassure Rose, to comfort her. He was capable of such streaks of nobility even when he was posing. But he disconcerted Rose; he was too plastic. He had an air of the thing being settled. She turned to me suddenly with, "Do you know her?"

I felt the burden of responsibility, especially as I hadn't made up my mind at all. So many things came into it, and what I felt more than anything was that Bill was seeing everything in terms of Rose and not of Jessie Bland. And here was Rose asking the essential question, sweeping aside Bill's sentiment, while I, who should help her, was trying to make a colourless reply that should not incline the balance either way. I did say things and even with some emphasis, but they had very much the effect of cancelling one another. And, really, I knew very little about Jessie Bland. I had never had occasion to consider her seriously and I was afraid of doing her an injustice with a vague suggestion that she didn't count for much. And of course she did count; she was counting now, and with Rose's eyes on me I could not be ungenerous

to any woman. And I, too, was thinking and caring about Rose and not so much about the others. I had never had such an opportunity before, I had never been so important to her. I loved her, I suppose, but one loves a woman for superficial things. Call them so, but they do not matter the less. Superficial things may be an unerring index; they are far more, for the graces of body and mind justify the lover; he can never know enough to spare himself the risks of the adventure. And now she changed, she glowed and paled, she trembled and hesitated, and she was inflexibly concentrated on her object. For she cared nothing for us, she thought all the time of the girl, she was always staunch to her. She weighed what I said with dissatisfaction, she wanted more, she appealed to Bill. I think he was having the time of his life, for he liked things big and serious, and he was one of those who could be in them and outside at the same time; he was always critical. And Bill was chivalrous and punctilious; he insisted that he was the girl's first lover and could not desert her. This pointed to some ugly possibilities, but he said rather finely that it could not be a common disgrace to be associated with him. We were not getting very close to anything, and yet Bill appeared to be making such a clear case of it that it seemed quite unnecessary

to have called in Rose to consult. He seemed to be overwhelming her, but she muttered—and I think it was half to me—"Can he do it? Can he do it?" He didn't hear or it didn't check him and he said fine things about discipline and the power of ideals. I seem to be making a comedy of it, but it was hardly comic then, though I felt that there was something unreal about it all. Bill was my friend and nobody admired him as I did, but he was comic in a big way. Partly, I could not enjoy it, because Rose was greatly perturbed. He impressed her—he impressed me though I was still sceptical—but she couldn't quite trust him. She looked at me and I took it for an inquiry. I said, "I don't think it's all quite sound," and Bill, pausing in his peroration, heard me.

He looked from me to her and then they both looked at me and I had to speak. "Mr. Campion is my friend," I said, "and like you I want to get at the hard facts of the thing; I can't when he talks like that."

"You don't think me sincere?" said Bill, looking at her.

"In a way, he's sincere or thinks he is," I said; "he feels all he's been saying tremendously."

"Well?" she said.

I found it dreadfully difficult; I couldn't explain coldly, I didn't want to explain at all. They both

waited and, lamely enough, I said that a generous temperament hardly met the case.

"Fenn has reason to distrust me, I daresay," said Bill. "You will not. You know more than he does. Yes, you know me better."

"What has Mr. Fenn to say?" said Rose.

I looked at her face, which was pale and anxious as I had never seen it before. No, she was not thinking of herself and she wanted the truth. I said, "It's you that stimulates him; he's saying all this for you. He means it, I daresay, but it's got nothing to do with Jessie Bland."

She did not question or deprecate, but just looked from one to the other of us, frowning. Then Bill said, with a magnificent simplicity, "I can do nothing without your help." Her frown deepened as she concentrated on him. "What have I to do with it?" she cried. "What do you mean?"

"You do stimulate me," he said; "you do inspire me."

She made a motion as if to gather her draperies together. "I feel as if I had been trapped," she said. Then she burst out, "You just want to philander with me. It's all vapour and sentiment. You care nothing for her and you seem to assume that she would marry you. I don't know that. I don't know her; I hardly know her, but I've thought she looked sad. I thought I might

do some good by coming here, but you've confused me with your talk. It seemed that, after all, you were not bad, but now I see the sin and shame of it again. Help you? What do I care for you? We women must stick together."

Bill was not the man to be put off by this. He kindled at it, indeed, but what is more he got to another plane, he got deeper into himself. "Oh, yes!" he said, "I daresay I've been talking windy stuff, but it's difficult to be plain. I'm afraid of you. I'm afraid of the whole truth when I come to you. You couldn't get down to me. I'm a brute, I'm bestial, but I'm more than that. I've been a common brute to this girl and I don't like it. I want to make amends, of course, and so I come to you. Why? Fenn will tell you that I wanted to cut a figure — a sort of stage magnanimity with you for audience. He's clever—Fenn. There's something in it, of course. I wanted to confess to you, I wanted you to know. I've been thinking of you constantly. You'll hate that. How should I dare to think of you? But I'm not callous. I have thought of the girl. It was all wretched; I wanted to act decently but I was on a low level. And then it seemed that if you would help me it would all be exalted; I could get the best out of myself. I admit—I admit, Fenn—that I craved

some sort of excitement. I see now. I was miserable and I wanted you to come into it. I persuaded myself that it was best. I knew you were not like other women."

When he stopped she turned her wondering, reproachful eyes on me as though she would challenge me to subtract anything from the nobility of such an avowal. "Miss Avory," I said, "I think he could do nothing better than come to you."

"And yet," she said, and I think that this was really a parenthesis addressed to me, "I have nothing but my faith in Christ. If I had any wisdom it would come from that."

"Perhaps that is what makes you different from the others," said Bill.

She had a little concession of humour. "I suppose we shall end by paying compliments all round," she said. I think there was in this something of timid withdrawal; she had spoken to us of Christ and it startled her, for her religion was not easily declared. Yet she continued, "You haven't that. Why should I speak of Christ to you?"

She looked at me but Bill answered, "What would He have me do?"

She was deeply agitated. We waited, with growing commiseration, for her to speak. "I'm

all confused," she said. "I'd like to say something simple and sweeping, but I can't. All sorts of worldly things must come in. It isn't that I haven't faith. I must think and pray. I must see Jessie Bland. Our ways are so far from His. It would be easy just to choose to be merciful and generous, but you must look ahead. Oh! I'm tempted just to think of Christ when I should think of you and Jessie Bland. Isn't that a strange temptation? You think Christianity is just shutting your eyes; you don't know how hard it is. I'm miserable because it doesn't seem to help me now." Apologetically she added, "Never mind that."

I think we were both casting about in our minds for something reassuring. Bill, I think, would have embraced the Christian religion there and then if he could have done it plausibly. And then, while we were both thrilling with anxiety and commiseration, she seemed to shrug off this great preoccupation; almost embarrassingly she became a girl, a young lady, again. She made the preliminary movements of departure, and with a slight, disarming smile paused for a cool, inoffensive inspection of books and photographs; doubtless she was trying to master her emotions and possibly she had some dim idea of studying Bill in his environment. Rather, I think, she was sorry for

him and she couldn't be sorry by halves. There was nothing of the Puritan dragon about her. Some of the photographs were a little queer—nothing merely gross, for Bill was always critical—and over one or two she knitted her brows, not passing over them lightly nor dwelling on them long. We stood watching her and she looked absurdly pretty. Half turning to Bill she said, "I don't quite know what I'm doing here." It was like an exquisite piece of coquetry. You couldn't keep up indignation long with Bill and, after all, he was not far from despair. In his own way he had been making a renouncement. I think her delicate apprehensions told her this, I think she was oppressed with sympathy for him. It occurred to me that she was big enough to overlook a great deal; she was not just horrified and impotent in the presence of sin, but ready to sympathise with the sinner. I was not jealous then, for I sympathised with Bill too; I think I saw him more sharply desolate than she did.

She had no cloakings to do and having concluded her little tour she nodded to us gravely. She turned at the door and said to me quickly, "He's your friend, isn't he? That's real? You can't think him a blackguard? I think, at the heart of him, he's very, very good—or I wouldn't

be here." I put my hand on Bill's shoulder and she stood looking at us.

I wanted to offer to walk home with her, but it didn't seem quite fair to Bill and, besides, I was sure she wouldn't have me. We all crowded out into the little lobby together. I had a notion that Bill was swelling with some kind of farewell speech and I was sure that we should be better without it. She seemed extraordinarily gentle now and her last words were something mildly jocular about the censorious Mrs. Gregson seeing her. It was a curious end and I wasn't sure that it was quite right. But I didn't want her exactly right.

Bill and I went back to the room and we were very flat. I think we were both apologetic, without being clear what there was to apologise for. We had been greatly excited and we couldn't recapture the excitement; to discuss the matter coldly now would have been terrible for Bill. I think he was afraid that I might begin, but I only wanted to give her time to get away, so that he could not suspect that I was after her. It would have been ridiculous to stay talking about Shakespeare and the musical glasses and so we just prolonged pipe-filling and lighting and then I was off. I resisted a foolish inclination to shake hands with him.

I wondered, not very deeply, which way Rose had gone home to the Blundells', for though the obvious road was the highway on the levels she might choose the old road over the hill. I mounted it slowly and before I reached my gate I saw her. She was far ahead, at the bare top of the hill just before the dip of the road that would soon bend sharply to the left and take her to the field path which passes close to the Blundells' gate. She was silhouetted against the sky and it appeared that she was gazing upwards. It was a night of stars and if they had not the winter's brilliancy they shone with a clear effulgence. I gazed at them too, deeply conscious that we had them in common. There are not two ways of gazing at the stars, and yet here and now it seemed that only she and I possessed them. I peered into that glowing mystery a long time; I forgot her. Then as physical reaction brought me to earth, I looked for her and she was gone.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PROPRIETIES.

And the next time I met her was on the tennis ground, where she and I made a pair in the last match of the season against a club which came from one of the Manchester suburbs. It was a curious parenthesis—serious matters behind and before and this jolly companionship of the moment. I think we both enjoyed it; I did tremendously. Of course the game was engrossing; our first encounter was with the strong pair of the other side and we beat them after a great struggle during which we were several times losing. We heartened one another; reproaches were jocular and commendations stimulating. I was apt to be a little shaky after a bad shot, but she wouldn't permit this; she braced me up; she appealed for loyalty with her smiling eyes. It was a microcosm of comradeship and yet sometimes the emotions were almost of the great order. How well we got on together! I liked to see her flushed and a trifle dishevelled, I liked her little despairing gestures when she failed and her generous, friendly

tributes to the skill of our opponents. When she served I fed her with balls almost too tenderly, I felt that I was putting too much devotion into it. What did the game matter?

It does not do to be too happy in a close match and she recalled me with a "Don't get slack," quite simply and briskly. I became a little over-zealous and smashed one or two balls out of the court. We lost the game and we could hardly afford it. Then at the critical point when they seemed to have collared us she took to lobbing, which requires steady nerves when you have been going downhill. I had a fleeting vision of her —I hadn't time to appreciate it then—looking upward to follow the flight of her ball with a slight, cunning smile; she was like a good little girl who is bringing off a trick. And then she introduced an irregular alternation of forehand driving and our opponents never knew which to expect. "You're getting brutal now," I said, and her reply—quite adequate, I admit—was "Hush!" We had another little crisis when Bill Campion, who was not playing, came to watch us. I saw her glance at him and fancied a change in her, a return to a preoccupation. But it did not unsteady her; on the contrary she became too careful, she was just taking command of herself. So then it was my turn to say, "Don't get pawky!" and

she smiled and hit the other man on the chin with her next return. They were pleasant, sportsman-like people and accepted their defeat graciously; we had all liked the game.

Our next match was easier and she was a little more distant with me; we were friendly but not so closely allied. There was Bill in a deck-chair, smoking his cigar and watching us and I felt that it was not quite right of him. He was not a man for effacements; he had a royal way of going to the point and to watch us was as near as he could get to the point just now. His presence tended to our separation, for, with his eyes on us, one began to act with discretion. He joined us when we all went off to tea, and for that there was a numerous company, including the Lyddens and the rank of Darley generally. Tassell, it seemed, had a bit of a grievance, for he suspected—if he did not accuse—his opponents of "deliberately" lobbing from the corner where the sun was behind them, and this, as he explained privately, was contrary to the public school spirit. At first Tassell exercised a clumsy care in refraining from public reproach, but he could not avoid the subject altogether and his tainted congratulations on a victory of tactics nettled his opponents slightly. The man disclaimed any intention of taking advantage of the sun, though, as he said, it was

quite permissible to do it, and the girl avowed that if she'd thought of it she'd have given it them every time. With an awful, sacerdotal smile Tassell professed a perhaps excessive attachment to the public school spirit; he mouthed the phrase with some recovery of complacency. Bill Campion suggested that a good many spirits possessed the public schools and appealed to young Torkington, whose colours made him their most obvious representative, as to whether he would lob with the sun. That degenerate specimen of a great institution did not like Tassell and said, "I jolly well would." It appeared that he had given much consideration to the point or similar ones, and, as he said, "You change at one, three, five, so you can do the same." But Tassell would have none of this and found a supporter to put it to the company whether if the opposing lady hurt her foot you would try to place balls where she had to run for them. This bothered Torkington, who asked Tassell if he would drop balls short over the net against a strong wind. Tassell was not very sure about this and said it depended on circumstances. In a pause a lady, who managed to convey an impression of magnificence in her summer clothing, was heard to say that she had heard the Turtons were thinking of sending their boy to the Manchester Grammar School. One of

the visitors, perceiving the chilly reception of this news, said, "Is there any harm in that? I went there." I saw Rose give him an intimate look; indeed, I believe she winked at him and he subsided with a smile.

The visitors went early and those who had played in the match left the courts for others to play in. The late afternoon was mild and it was pleasant to dawdle about on deck-chairs and watch the clouds or even the flying balls. It was queer to see Bill Campion sitting near Rose in a group that included Tassell and the Lyddens. Bill was quiet and rather moody. He listened with a rather ironic affability to a lady who described the unexceptionable preparatory school to which she had sent her boy. From there he would pass to— "But what do you recommend, Mr. Campion? You were at Copplestone, I think. I suppose that's excellent?" Bill said he didn't suppose it was any worse than some of the others. I think he was enjoying himself in a way; in the way that a man does who sits on a powder barrel while the rest of the company suppose it to be butter. He was a reckless fellow, but Rose was there. Talk about preparatory schools seemed fairly safe. Incredibly, I heard Jessie Bland mentioned.

I didn't get the hang of it at once, for the group from which her name emerged had been talking

about some alterations to the clubhouse. It was a question of joinering and the relative merits of Pouncey and Harper for the job. I hadn't been paying attention to what seemed a futile discussion when the name startled me. I looked at Bill who was listening with all his features, at Rose who was inscrutable and alert. I fancied that there was an "atmosphere," but soon I found that I was mistaken. Jessie's name came up again and its connection with "the latest engagement" gave me the sensation of a tremendous upheaval. I met Rose's eye fixed on me warningly and I am sure I must have looked queer. And then I realised, as the talk went on, that the news was young Harper's engagement to Jessie Bland. It was the kindly way of us superior folk to take an interest in such things; Jessie was a pleasant young person who knew her place and Reuben Harper—Reuben was his name it seemed—a steady fellow and a good workman. Cases were cited of Pouncey having used green wood and even of a mis-measurement which had thrown things out of the straight, but Harper was virtue incarnate. It is unfortunate that in the lower classes an excess of virtues leads sometimes to Dissent and Harper belonged distinctly to the chapel lot. Indeed, he preached sometimes; we were not sure that he wasn't what is called a local preacher. "None

the worse for that," said Lydden, with a cheery liberality that made us all feel very broad and generous. A manly fellow, mind you, and famous as the best goalkeeper Darley had ever had. Bill came in now with a story of a young vicar in the South with whom he had been staying—I don't believe he ever stayed with any vicar in the South —and of their talk about the Church and the village and the humanising influences of contact and objects in common. "And what sort of a cricket club have you?" Bill had said. The vicar's reply was gloomy, "The Dissenters have got hold of cricket."

Rose laughed frankly and suddenly, and when they perceived that Lydden was chuckling some of the others joined her decorously. Tassell preserved an honourable seriousness, and indeed Bill's story died like the sound of a drop in an empty bucket. With this astonishing news between the three of us and each wondering whether the others knew more or whether indeed there was anything to know, we went on chattering. Perhaps Rose knew that if she stirred, Bill or I or both of us would be after her. When you are physically comfortable and the sun is setting slowly there is virtue in delay. I didn't want to stir; I was curious, of course, but I think I am not voracious and there was something to go on with. The

outsides of things may acquire a value even from their insignificance. Here we were sitting in the sunshine, friends and neighbours, with the beautiful, familiar hills about us. It was a perfect surface. You may live profoundly in such circumstances and put away from you the harassing preoccupations of the world of conduct; at the most manners are wanted. Mrs. Lydden sat there, the type of safety and peace and sweet proprieties. She was yet on the womanly side of venerable and one had, or could conceive, a sort of twilight affection for her. I could range myself with it all; I could see her approved of God. And yet I rebelled, I broke away to the monstrous extreme. The God who approved of her will manifest himself, too, through those who would carry the head of such a woman on a pike. I had an ugly vision, obscurely derived, of an avenging rabble, whose violence was hardly more unjust than her placidity. A curious revulsion; I didn't like it, I put it away.

And here was Bill somehow blundering into big, inappropriate questions, such as an infusion of Christianity into labour problems. I don't know how he got started—I missed that—but he was making us all uneasy. Perhaps he, too, was undergoing a revulsion from the scene; or he may have had an obscure feeling that he was to be baulked of big emotions and so felt a need for

some kind of assertion. That coupling of names that we had overheard might mean a great change in the situation and it might be that his excitement demanded an outlet; anyhow, his talk bore an astonishing resemblance to earnestness. The new generation, the quality of self-sacrifice in the military ideal, the need to meet democracy halfway, not to oppose it—Bill gave us quite an oration. He had an eye on Rose, of course, but he was feeling it all. The middle-class suburban—"Your congregation, you know," he said to Lydden. "I'm one of them though I don't go; we're all alike"—received a rare trouncing. "With our Schools for the Daughters of Gentlemen still surviving and our exclusive clubs—why shouldn't Reuben Harper play hockey here? He'd be a lot better in goal than old Mooney—and our fears that another shilling a week to the labourers means the disruption of society." Most of it was too rhetorical to hurt much and the Lyddens hardly turned a hair though Tassell was uneasy. The general feeling was that all this was in very poor taste and, indeed, Bill could hardly be helping anything forward. He went far enough to make me feel very uncomfortable, for I've always had —even despicably—the social sense. I like to imagine sharp, bizarre things and to look back on them, but at the time I'm for smoothing things

over, for getting back to the road. Bill was almost eloquent and quite biting sometimes, but one felt that he was just letting his mood have its way. And it wasn't quite fair; all this was nearer my line than his; he was poaching. Yes, he was excited and grasping at something that eluded him. I think he had revelled in the idea of dishing himself socially, and now the linking of Jessie's name with Reuben Harper's had brought something besides relief. He was a sensational creature baulked of his sensations and with portions of desperation left over. Clearly, the audience wasn't up to it; Bill on Christian ideals was altogether too much for them. Though he was intensely conscious of Rose the others stimulated him too. Their feeble attempt to stem the tide, to keep things on the social level, ceased. I felt that it was time for some sort of interference when he got to bishops' incomes and the young man who had great possessions. "We're all alike," he said; "we want to do things in reason. We like the idea of leaving all to follow Christ. There was nothing said about retaining a thousand a year."

Lydden got up and strolled away and Mrs. Lydden continued to regard Bill indulgently, as though he were a rude little boy whose nurse would presently take him off our hands. Tassell,

I am sure, felt that the public school spirit was completely submerged and that protests would be useless. Bill came to a pause, oppressed, perhaps, by the lack of opposition. He turned to Rose and said, quite sociably, "I talk a lot of nonsense, don't I?"

"You're so material," she said. "You just talk of the outsides of things."

I don't think it was quite fair. I think she wanted to take him down a peg. And Bill, who certainly fancied that he was getting to the spirit, was checked. Perhaps, like me, he was wondering what was the heart of things for this young creature who so easily dismissed his impassioned utterances. He was considerably deflated, and took it well. His geniality reasserted itself and he challenged Tassell to a game of bowls. Tassell, who despised the game, declined. "Come, be a Christian," cried Bill. "I want a game." But Tassell said he must go and Bill and I turned out. His bowling was very wild and several times he put on the wrong bias; he was rather uproarious. It seemed that we both had an eye on Rose, for when I saw she was preparing to go off with Gertie and realised that we were fast in our game, Bill promptly cut the knot. "That's enough," he said, and left me to put away the bowls.

I overtook them on the way down the hill and

Gertie fell behind to walk with me. I wondered what she knew or surmised when she reverted to Jessie Bland and Harper. It seemed that there was a positive engagement and that the marriage was to be soon. Reuben Harper reminded her of Adam Bede, she said, or rather of Seth—something between the two; perhaps I didn't read George Eliot? She read all the women writers. "We must stick together," she said. "No, I don't want to be fair. I'll be fair when you are." She was a loyal little creature, content to wait upon Rose. Her loyalty made her reserved now, I surmised. Returning to the safe exterior of a subject possibly dangerous, she said, "He makes coffins, too." The inference involved Reuben and Adam Bede—or was it Seth? And to make coffins may be a little ghoulish in the wrong person, but in the right it gives assurance of depth and gravity. Reuben was the right man for Jessie; he wouldn't extinguish her spark but fan it into a proper glow. What did she know about it all? The natural thing was to say something about Bill's performance at the club. We both avoided it.

It seemed to me that we all parted reluctantly. Was it that we had between us big things unsounded, that great curiosities were unappeased? I don't think so. With me at least it was the

moment that mattered. The sun had not set and I wanted to prolong the happy contacts of the day. The girls chattered and fluttered and it seemed infinitely worth while to detain them; they were not unwilling. One of them concocted an errand to a shop and we all went together. Bill and I bought chocolates handsomely. Putting other things aside we were merry and kind, and yet I couldn't get rid of the feeling that Bill was not innocent like us. The time for parting had come and he impudently proposed a walk. It wouldn't do and we fell asunder; the parting was nearly grave, after all.

I stayed for a minute with Bill. He told me that Rose had known about the engagement and approved. "Then Harper knows." He nodded. "Fine sort of fellow," he said. "I want to abase myself and tell him he's the better man." "You'd better leave it," I said. He agreed, but I think he felt he was missing an emotion.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE MISTS.

I HAD a week's holiday in hand and Bill proposed that we should go somewhere together. He made the proposal casually, but I fancied a touch of wistfulness and, when I agreed, a touch of gratitude. He wanted to get away, he wanted to put something between him and this cursed place. So he said and it seemed natural enough. Rose was away with Gertie—I didn't know where—and so the curse descended on the place. Where should we go? I had never been away with Bill and the prospect was attractive. A week's golf? No, that was not the sort of thing he wanted and I perceived that we should do what he wanted. Paris? He eyed me wonderingly as though he would say, "What should I do with *you* in Paris?" No, it wasn't a case for Paris. And then, running to the other extreme, almost jocularly I asked him how he would like a walk among the hills—Wales say, or the Lakes. "Ah! yes," he said, "there's the Lake District. That's an idea." Cunning old devil! He knew that Rose was there.

He played the idea of the Lakes and ultimately landed it. I think he enjoyed my slight degree of mystification and, as usual, he did his part thoroughly. He quoted Wordsworth and the "host of golden daffodils," though I reminded him that we could hardly hope for daffodils in September. "You're a materialist," he said; "a holiday should always give you the spring mood." I accused him of being a high-class variety entertainment—"now comes the Wordsworth turn." We were jocund and discussed the advantages of knapsacks and an extended line or the radiation from an inn with portmanteaus and the comfortable change of clothes. He was firmly for this, but he didn't jump at my proposal of Eskdale. He would rather be nearer the centre of things if I didn't mind. As it was all more or less fresh to him he was not so ready for remote valleys—— "Remote from what?" I asked—and hadn't I spoken sometimes of an inn at Rosthwaite and of a fat landlady who cooked miraculously? It depressed him a little to hear that she was dead; he digressed quite charmingly about ghostly landladies and the steam of forty thousand dinners; an element of sentimental pilgrimage was suggested.

It is never difficult to persuade me to Borrowdale. I mentioned Seatoller and Mrs. Pepper,

whose entertainment is more austere than that of the defunct Mrs. Rigg, but nearer to the Wordsworthian spirit and yet so comfortable in its kind. "Seatoller?" he said ruminatingly, "that's near Stonethwaite; but shouldn't we have to order our drinks in? Have they a licence?" He had a remarkable acquaintance with the map, though he didn't seem to know the places. It was settled that we should go to the inn at Rosthwaite and Bill went off to wire for rooms.

We slept at Ambleside the next night and Bill, primed for enjoyment, gave us a good start in his appreciation of "The Salutation" as the right name for a hostelry; we had a bottle of wine to our cold supper and he toasted the inn boyishly. The eve of a holiday is always romantic though the middle and end may be dogged enough and Bill lived his moment amazingly. He had the advantage over me, he had mysterious intimations, it seemed, and my anticipations were almost sober. Presently he joined gaily in a smoke-room argument which progressed from the constitution of an English eleven to the place of aeroplanes in war and the general question of armaments. Bill was for doing things handsomely as usual and spoke almost passionately for doubling everything the Germans did. Failing this he was for a complete abandonment of all military and naval pre-

parations and an experiment in Christian ideals. No compromise. The experiment would be extraordinarily interesting and some nation should make it. Why not England? Through clouds of smoke the company blinked at him in some perplexity. One fellow said, "Are you a Quaker or what?" "That among other things," said Bill. "He's pulling your leg," said another. His extreme affability disarmed them.

Our bags had gone round by Keswick and we set off light in the morning with a fair provision of sandwiches and flasks. I had proposed that we should cross to Rosthwaite by the usual walker's way—Far Easdale and Greenup Ghyll—but Bill's desire to get to the centre of things was inveterate and he conceived this to be the Sty Head Pass. We should see plenty of that, I told him, if we stayed at Rosthwaite, but he assured me that the principle of his life was not to brook postponement. So, willingly enough, I set off with him on the mild and yet exhilarating September morning and we had soon left Clappersgate behind. We had found beauty everywhere, for our eyes were fresh and rejoiced in every stretch of the fells; Elterwater with its rushes or reeds—which are they? I can't recollect—shone with a subdued, veiled radiance, and in front the mountains loomed entrancingly. The clouds were

there, but they were lifting, and we footed it along the flats of Langdale with light hearts. The wall of mountains was the symbol of high endeavour and if we got to something of realism in the ascent of Rossett Ghyll we were ready for that too. We sweated like heroes and liked it; Bill's analogy of the pilgrims bedewing the shrine with their tears did well enough. We promised ourselves lunch at the top, but we held on till Angle Tarn. It's a sombre, magnificent place and to eat there was, as Bill said, a bit familiar, but we didn't want to leave it behind. I didn't, anyhow; he seemed almost anxious to get on. Bill saw the tarn and its surroundings as a great piece of scenery, but it was impossible to conceive a drama big enough for it; little figures struggling in the foreground would be ludicrous. Yet we agreed that this magnificence was in the soul of man even when he munched ham sandwiches. "Why don't we come here oftener?" asked Bill. "Would the glory wear away?" And he went on to expound his philosophy of taking what you want and doing what you want to do. You come to harm sometimes, of course, but—I didn't say that other people came to harm but he had anticipated my thought. "Yes, yes," he said, "I know, but these politenesses and reticences and rules! You bring the human race to a state

of atrophy. Let's get to business. If you want to enter—knock. Don't wait there for the door to be opened. Let's be simple; let's just take hold of things." He talked rather nervously; I couldn't imagine why.

We trudged on and it struck me that this was a slow means of progression for Bill, who rushed about in hansoms and express trains so much. He wouldn't have it, though, when I suggested this, yet I think he was conscious, intermittently, of the mere plodding. "You can always have the idea," he said, "and that beats express trains as easily as cabs," and then—

"As swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,"

he quoted. I congratulated him on the correctness—the super-correctness—of his attitude, and indeed I was just a little afraid that he might find Wordsworth and the Lake District too slow. Yes, he was nervous. I think I detected then a touch of deprecation in his manner; certainly I realised it afterwards. He startled me a little by using my Christian name. Godfrey sounded strange on his lips, but I was thrilled by it and melted too; I had an impulse of affection for him. And then he began to chuckle and to my inquiry he said that he had thought of a good joke. He was reluctant, as he said, to anticipate the oppor-

tunity of bringing out the joke crisply, but he was too full of it to delay; he was the sort of man that filled and emptied quickly. The joke was a familiar contraction of my name. He proposed to call me God. "It suits you," he said, "or it will when I've got into it. You're rather like God, you know. You can wait, you can brood, you're a portentous sort of chap. And uncommon wise." I objected that God wasn't wise but mathematically correct. "Yes, you can be a bit arid," he said, "and of course when I say God I don't mean Christ." And then he propounded a very strange and illuminating theory. "She," he said—and I knew whom he meant—"she is a Unitarian." I stared at this. What did he mean? He gave me time to search but not to find. Then, "Don't you see," he said, "that her God is Christ? Is it so uncommon? I believe there are more Unitarians in the Church than out of it." Presently he added, with a dreadful hilarity, "Yes, my boy, I've been thinking a bit about the Trinity. Rum subject for me?"

We walked in silence, and I could almost see the old chap as tragical—I hardly knew why; perhaps I was comical to him. Bill was magnificent but he was impossible; I could not conceive him in the permanent human relations.

And yet he was a son and a brother, and I daresay a good one; staunchness of friendship could not be impossible to him. It might be that I had only penetrated to the middle depths, that there was a firm substratum yet. And if so he was still impossible. I held to that as to a dogma and with a personal arrogance that was a treachery to him.

Bill was not a plodding walker. He waxed and waned as gusts of feeling or enthusiasm took him and failed him. When the track was convenient only for one at a time he would shoot ahead or he would yield place to me and drop behind. After we had passed Esk Hause he developed a kind of expectancy; as I followed I saw him constantly looking ahead and hastening for the unobstructed view. And yet it was I, in front again, who remarked the emergence of a tent as we approached Sprinkling Tarn and his "By Jove! yes" had no more than the quality of a natural surprise. As we drew nearer and perceived figures my "They're women!" brought a very innocent "So they are," but I turned for a moment to scrutinise his impassive face before fixing attention upon them. They were two—three, for another emerged from the tent and there was something familiar in her movements. I turned to him with a sort of indignation. "What

are you up to?" I demanded and stopped to confront him. "Don't stop," he said; "they're watching us." And then he added, "What an extraordinary coincidence!"

"Coincidence?"

"What do you call it? Did you know?" said Bill as bold as brass. And then he went on, "Don't be a fool, Fenn. Do you pretend you're sorry? D'you mean to say you want that tent and these women to disappear and leave us with these blooming old mountains? You're not such an ass as you pretend to be. Stretch out your hand and take what you want."

"Do they know we're coming?" I asked him.

"Fenn! Of course they don't. It's a coincidence I tell you. I believe I did hear Gertie Blundell say something about Wales or the Lakes. Don't hang back. Be natural. Wave your hat, man. Look surprised. If you come up looking hang-dog they'll think there's something wrong about it."

It was in my mind that he knew and I didn't. Why was this favour shown to him? And by whom? He had said it was Gertie, but Gertie would hardly dare to do anything against the wish of her chief. Had Bill been magnanimous in letting me into it or was it a condition?—did she

know?—how would she receive us? "Who's the other one?" I said.

"My dear chap, how should I know?"

We did our best to make our gestures appropriate as we hastened towards them. I was certainly surprised, but I thought that Rose would suspect some sort of collusion and the innocent man finds it very hard to act innocence. Bill was far more convincing in his exclamations or ought to have been; he constructed the situation, so to speak. Yet presently I saw that Rose had an interrogative eye on him, for he was an energetic actor and disposed to embroider his part. "I thought it was Wales you were going to," he said, and Rose looked at Gertie rather sharply. I took a chance to mutter that I really didn't know and she nodded. Her greeting had had a touch of reserve, but she put this by and became fairly cordial. Gertie was nervous and imitated Bill on a small scale; I saw them as two conspirators. We were introduced to Miss Crozier, who had maintained an air of rather critical detachment. She was a fair, pale girl, rather older than the others, with pince-nez and a competent look. I liked her very well—the first five minutes on the hillside carries you further than it would in the drawing-room—but I think she struck rather coldly on Bill's exuberant mood. However, he attacked

her bravely with two or three funny stories that had a doubtful appropriateness to the occasion—what you may call pot-luck stories. "Of course we shall give you tea," she said; "no woman can withstand an appeal for that." Gazing at the towering mass of Great End she said, "Mr. Campion brings his atmosphere with him." I felt a little disconcerted on Bill's account but he rallied finely. "I defy your mountains," he said; "I'm the symbol of man on earth; they won't get me down." I said, "He whistles to keep up our spirits."

And we were all extraordinarily happy; that was the point; that was Bill's justification. We helped to get the tea ready; Bill cut bread and butter while I went to fill the kettle at the tarn. The homeliness, the friendliness, in these great spaces was entrancing; I've never had such a picnic. When I pass Sprinkling Tarn now there is a startling loneliness about it; the world has rolled on obliterating us; you may find traces of the improvised fireplace as you find traces of the Romans away there in Eskdale. We were happy, we were jolly, and yet we didn't feel altogether unworthy of that great environment.

It was Miss Crozier who recalled us by asking me the direct question: "Did you know that we were here?" I think that on reflection she had

decided she wanted to know and was doubtful whether she could get it out of Gertie or Rose. I could have answered with a clear conscience, but Bill took the words out of my mouth with his windy half-denials. I think it was out of loyalty to Gertie, a sort of conspiratorial loyalty. "I suppose Mr. Fenn knew and you didn't," said Miss Crozier and added, "I don't believe in coincidences." She was shrewd, I could see, and there was Gertie looking at Rose uneasily and at Bill, it seemed, imploringly. I was not eager to repeat denials, having already an understanding with Rose, and the little intrigue amused me. And then Bill in his brave way grasped the nettle. "Of course I knew," he said, "and this innocent youth didn't. Miss Blundell wouldn't tell me, but I put two and two together and employed private detectives. Now, Miss Crozier," he cried, "you are a sensible woman, anybody can see that. You've got a calm eye. You don't believe in coincidences. Quite right. But don't you believe in making 'em. Are you going to wait for things to come to you? Here's Fenn, the soul of honour, and Miss Avory, a woman of great dignity and absolutely correct in every human relation. How are they ever to get any fun if we don't help 'em? And they're useful to us. Aren't they, Gertie?—Miss Blundell, I mean. They chaperon us. This

world wants a good deal of chaperoning, I admit that. But it's the devil when you're all chaperons. I call this a pleasant well-proportioned party." Bill paused, and looking round on the company he added in a serious voice, "Don't tell me that I stand alone."

He was serious enough to be comic and Gertie laughed hysterically. I think Rose joined in out of kindness to her, but her reserves didn't stand long and Miss Crozier failed to preserve her calm.

"My real difficulty is with Fenn," said Bill. "He's the Puritan, he's the killjoy. Never mind him; he'll come dragging along. Now, be honest. Do you want us just to go?"

"You'll have to go," said Miss Crozier; "you can't stay here."

"We're spending a few days at Rosthwaite," I said. "Are we to avoid this spot?"

"That's it, Fenn," said Bill encouragingly. "Naturally we pass here every day. Do you want us to leave the neighbourhood?"

"It's a free country," said Rose.

"They might be useful for bringing letters and things," said Gertie.

"Your letters go to Wasdale?" I asked.

"To Seathwaite," said Rose. "We thought Wasdale was more out of the way of the walks

we should go. It was Gertie's idea "—she looked at her suspiciously.

"Anything you want to-morrow?" said Bill.

They hung rather dubious. I asked for another cup of tea. "A full one," I said. Then raising the cup, I cried, "I propose Bill's health." Rose caught my eye. "I'll second it," she said; "Mr. Campion's health." We all drank it, Miss Crozier remarking, "On condition that he doesn't return thanks." It was good-natured enough and Bill said, "I believe she's found me out already."

It appeared that Miss Crozier was a climber and she offered to take Bill up the Pillar Rock—"or," she said, "there's pretty climbing about Great End here and Piers Ghyll." He demurred; he hadn't the head for it and admitted that he didn't like women to do such things. "You can't do it, so we shouldn't?" she said loftily. "That's my feeling," he said.

"You're frank."

"My one virtue."

"It must be a big one with all you have to admit."

"I'm a natural butt," said Bill. He had a deprecating eye on Rose from time to time and returned to seriousness. "You've received us generously," he said. "I was rather afraid on poor Fenn's account."

The great thing about Bill was that he was always dangerous; you didn't know what he would do next or how he would—as he might say—explore the situation. "It's been very jolly," he said. "We shall feel rather blank down at Rosthwaite. You'll be glad to get rid of us? Be sincere."

"You weren't on the programme, but we've been glad to see you," said Rose.

"It's hard for you," he said, "and you manage wonderfully. Do you know, Miss Crozier, she's got all sorts of reserves about us—about me—and yet she keeps so pleasant? She's thinking all the time that I'm a sinner and she ought to be saving my soul. She has the old-fashioned conception of the sinner and new ways of treating him. She can be as jolly as a sandboy, and yet deep in her are protests and reserves. She's the most awfully exclusive person. She wants to save you but she doesn't want to touch you. She'll be your friend but she's afraid to know you."

Bill stopped and then declined to an apologetic tone, "Quite out of place all this."

"You see," said Miss Crozier very kindly, "we didn't come here for this kind of thing. We wanted to be quiet among the mountains."

"You can't get away from yourself," said Bill.

"Well, I think, in a way you can."

"Were you thinking of the mountains when we came?"

"I think we were conscious of them."

"And we've disturbed you? We've spoilt it all?"

"I don't go so far as that. Disturbed, certainly."

"Fenn," said Bill, "we'd better be going."

"Oh, we'll assimilate you all right. There's a place for you even here."

"We've blundered into a retreat," I said.

"Ah! well," she quoted, "'Earth was not Earth until her sons appeared.'"

In all this I discerned the intention to protect Rose from Bill's onslaught. Perhaps protection was not necessary, for Rose had remained calm enough, but Miss Crozier appeared to be a friendly creature and alertly conscious of something unusual. She led us further away from it by reverting to our arrival and their various stages of surmise and conviction as we approached. Analogy was found in the case of her pink dress incredibly adorning the bulwarks of a Channel steamer. As thus: "What's that pink thing? It looks like a dress. It is a dress. It looks like my dress. It *is* my dress!" She dramatised it up to her interview with an apologetic seaman who could have recovered more if he had had a hook. "Y'see the

crane never did that before and we'd nothing ready. Couldn't stop to fish for the stuff neither." The pink dress was sole survivor, hardly a better equipment for continental travel than Bill's umbrella, which, he assured us, was once all that remained to him for a fortnight in Paris. You can manage with an umbrella if you add a toothbrush or so and like to embark on prodigies of explanation. We saw Bill at it and he made the world seem young again.

It was time for us to go and we reverted to gravity again—perhaps with a difference. The question was whether we were to go by Sty Head or the rougher and more direct Grain Ghyll; a long discussion ended in our tossing for it and as Sty Head won we went the other way. They set us on our way, which, as Bill said afterwards, was handsome. After we parted from them they stood watching our descent and it was strange to see them there in the waning light backed by the sombre fells. We turned to look at them from time to time, but they made no signal nor gesture; nor did we. I ruminated over Bill's muttered remark, "They can't get rid of us like that." Presently he stopped and said, "How does she think of me? Am I a blackguard to her—a sinner or what?"

"She drank your health," I said.

He went on and talked to me over his shoulder as the path was narrow. "I was right," he said. "I might have been fool enough to skulk and kow-tow to her holiness. But I knew she was too good for that. D'you know, she's making me feel an unclean brute just by making no difference?"

"You seemed happy enough," I said.

"Oh, I don't mind feeling that way," said Bill.

There had been no word of reunion and as we breakfasted at the inn next morning we tried at first to consider the day without reference to them. From Rosthwaite you may take a good many directions for a day's walk, and we discussed rather coldly the merits of the Buttermere hills and of an eastern tramp to terminate at Helvellyn. It all seemed very empty and as he lit his pipe in the porch Bill growled, "It won't do. What about Sprinkling Tarn? It's on the way to Scaw Fell Pike anyhow!" I laughed. He said, "It's frightfully obvious and I'd like to punish them by keeping away."

"Punish them!"

"No, but you understand what I mean. By the bye, did we promise to take their letters?"

We hung about, we were irresolute. I think we both had some notion of those poor maidens gazing out wistfully through the livelong day while we were tramping in the contrary direction. And yet

to call again so soon was like cheapening ourselves and even Bill—deliberately I say even Bill—shuddered at the possibility of a cold reception. We clung to the porch, we talked of ordering sandwiches for lunch, we laced our boots, we began to get cross with one another. And then as I looked rather commiseratingly at Bill's gloomy face an extraordinary change came over it and he said in a whisper, "By God! they're here." I turned and saw them stepping bravely down the road, compact and yet, it seemed, a-flutter, startling and yet immensely comforting; an irruption of light and colour, familiar and romantic. Bill sat and stared and it seemed as if he could not move. He voiced my own anxiety when he said, "Will they go past?" and when they turned into the garden of the inn I think we both breathed deeply. We rose and advanced to meet them. Rose, foremost, said, "We're not sure whether we were entirely nice to you yesterday and we've called to ask you to go a walk."

We were taken aback, as they say; we might almost have been discomfited. "Perhaps you don't approve," said Miss Crozier. "But we do, enormously," I said and Bill said, "Enormously"; and he was too sincere about it to choose his words. Gertie Blundell then asserted herself in a pleasant semi-ironical way, "We don't want to interfere

with your plans," she said, to which Bill replied, "Our plans were simply to call at your camp as soon as a suitable time had elapsed."

"Then we *are* too soon," said one of them—I forget which—and Bill was hearty at last with "I see we're going to have a good day." We bustled about for sticks and maps, and Bill clutched me by the arm to mutter, "It's so well bred, you know—to do a thing like this."

"It's Christian of them," I said, hardly knowing what I meant by it and he paused in his preparations.

"Does it strike you like that?" he said. "Damn it, Fenn; is it that? Well, we mustn't look a gift horse in the mouth. I am a sinner to her, I suppose; I'm one of the vile. I sometimes forget it."

"You know I didn't mean that," I said, but when he asked what I did mean I couldn't reply. We were both ready to assume that the initiative was hers; we were both possessed with the idea of her religion. It certainly didn't obtrude and presently we were striding along the road in a loose group; we were so delightfully sociable that everyone wanted every other and not to go two and three. We made for Sprinkling Tarn again, this time by Sty Head, for they had invited us to lunch. We were almost ecstatic; as Bill said, we were all lyrical

without having to bother about the rhymes. It was autumn, it wasn't a safe day but the morning freshness had not gone. It was Gertie who said, "Yes, but we aren't quite so fresh as you. We've done six miles." And then we all discussed the differences between us and how far the physical told on the spirit. It was a jocular agreement that the six miles was a reasonable start to give to the natural gravity of the male.

Bill and I offered to prepare lunch while they rested, but as they were always getting up to show us how to do things or where they were it was little more than a compliment. It was a simple meal but hearty and there was copious, eager talk. It touched the arts and I protested that we might as well be in a studio or a drawing-room; should not Great End protect us from the elegancies? Bill declaimed against life having to be in terms of environment and introduced the analogy of explorers enjoying a snug game of bridge at the North Pole. In a genuine outburst of admiration Gertie declared that Bill ought to be put into a book and he declared that he had been—that he was the original of Little Lord Fauntleroy. This was good enough to make us roar or ring with laughter —Bill contributed generously to the roar—and so we got to the *roman à clef* and were too unanimous for argument in jeering at the suburban habit of

recognising traits and insisting on complete identification — "as if," said Bill, "anyone who is an artist would borrow a man or could do without men." And presently we began to talk about acting and Bill said to Rose, "I want to see you act. You're a great actress."

Gertie said impulsively, "She's the most sincere person you ever met."

"I don't say she isn't," said Bill, "but she's got her sincerities in control. She's guarded. She's got hold of herself. You must be sincere to be a great artist. You can be sincere in a gigantic piece of make-believe. It's the artist that has an inner life."

Rose looked at him steadily and then away at the fell and the sky, and the effervescence went from our talk; she did not snub him nor appear to resent what he said. Miss Crozier gave us some relief by remarking that Rose would not be a great success in melodrama.

Presently there was an access of energy or restlessness and we determined to go up Scaw Fell Pike. Generously or discreetly Miss Crozier refrained from the suggestion of any climbers' way and we set off up Esk Hause. This time our spirits were not so high and we soon spread out into parties. Rose and I were behind. The cloud hung over Great End and it was pretty certain

that we should not find it clear at the top of the Pike. At the head of the Hause we turned off all right and were soon in the mist. We had not talked much and now we had to attend to the little cairns that marked our way. The others were out of sight and I was thrilled to be thus alone with her. The mist drove past us furiously and in endless supply; we could barely see from one cairn to another. She was the only finite thing in the world and endearingly familiar. She looked at me now and then almost deprecatingly as though to say, "It's strange isn't it? We've never been here before." Her hair was blown about and wet wisps of it struck queerly across her face. I said, "Are you liking it?" And she said, "Yes, I think I am; part of me is, anyhow. Are you?" I said, "I think I like it with every bit of me," and she said, "Well, you've no skirts."

And then we found that we had missed the cairn and went back to find the last one and couldn't. We groped about for them but couldn't find any and came to rough, precipitous ground which certainly should not have been on our way. It was with some chagrin that I remembered I had lent my compass to Bill the day before and that he hadn't returned it; when I mentioned this in some abasement Rose laughed and said that Margaret Crozier had one. They were all right and I could

believe what Rose said about Miss Crozier's capabilities for keeping on the right path. She said, "I'm not liking it quite so much now," and I felt that I must take hold of the situation. She was not obviously nervous but she admitted that she felt rather cold. I said, "Let's try a shout," and we raised our voices together. At first this was rather heartening, but there was no response and it became disheartening. "We'll leave them to it and get down," I said and, as she assented, we began to try various directions. We agreed that the wind was westerly and thought that if we kept it nearly at our backs we should strike Esk Hause. But we kept coming to places that we didn't like and turning from them, and though we never quite relinquished system our movements resembled an aimless scramble. I was vexed with myself but she was quite comradely and never implied a shadow of reproach. It was strange to be lost there with her in a world of driving mists and dim rocks that came and departed like shadows, but I was anxious now and couldn't savour our intercourse. We tried descents and gave them up—I suppose we were skirting the precipices of Great End—and then, coming to a gully, I told her to wait while I explored a few yards of it. Near the top there was a little kink with a rock and when I got round this I lost sight of her. And then came

a horrible experience. The gully was steep and rather wet, and parts of it were coated with slippery soil. I began to slip and there was no holding; I didn't know what lay below. It was by a tremendous effort of will that I saved myself; only the day before I had discussed with Bill a theory that if you are slipping down a slope you may pull up by spreading yourself rigidly over the greatest possible surface. It is a difficult thing to do; I daresay it would have been impossible if I had known that I was almost at the edge, for then the instinct to huddle, to clutch, would have been overpowering. I pulled up on my back with my legs protruding into nothing and an uncomfortable view of the same between them.

The next five minutes—or was it ten?—or an hour?—was the worst thing I have ever lived through. Sorrows and misfortunes have their mitigations and their exaltations; to struggle for your life in rock and slime is arid misery. I heard Rose crying anxiously, "Are you all right?" and I steadied myself to reply, "Stay there; I'm coming back." It seemed that the vibrations of my voice might start me over the edge; a rift in the mist gave me a sickening view of fell and rock far below. And then came the ticklish job of getting over from back to stomach without assistance from my feet. I did accomplish it, but my nerve was

shaken and I made the mistake of trying to rush the slippery patch above me; I couldn't get an anchorage and came slithering down nearly to the bottom. My spread-eagle method saved me, but I had the dreadful idea that if I slipped again I shouldn't have the will to enforce it.

I rested a little, but even rest was precarious and then Rose's voice came to me again. She said, "I'm afraid you're in difficulties. I'm coming down. I'll be cautious." I cried, "No, no; you mustn't. I'm resting. I'm all right now. Don't worry"—that sort of thing. I began a slow careful ascent but it seemed impossible to maintain it; the sides of the gully were too smooth to help me and too wide apart. I thought of the possibility of anchoring while Rose went for help and a rope, but I couldn't have stayed hours where I was and I couldn't bear the thought of her alone on the mountain.

I'm thankful that my reason didn't desert me in the agony of that ascent. I tried the principle of cutting steps: that is to say, I dug and scraped with my fingers in the slippery stuff till I got a hold that would enable me to drag myself a little higher. I recall the despair when my nails encountered rock, the lifting of my heart when some small success brought me nearer to life and her. But I had not time to think of her except

in flashes. My body and spirit were ground to one with this cruel earth; it seemed that there was nothing but pain between me and exhaustion. I became incapable of thought or invention; I could hardly have clutched a rope if it had dangled before me; I felt I couldn't get out but my will persisted tyrannically and I crawled and clutched; I can't remember the details. Death was losing its terror and the temptation to give up was almost overwhelming. I had a glimpse of rest but it was confounded with the hurtling of a body through space. Probably the way was easier now if I had known it but my spirit was at the lowest; my weakness had found me out; only a thread of tenacity remained. Why do I recall it? I shall have it obtruding into my dreams again.

And then I was conscious of a voice, quavering and humble, that said, "Please tell me something." I cried, "Be silent. Be silent," and to myself I said, "Why can't she leave me alone?" I knew I was cruel, but I was cruelly oppressed and I couldn't keep her apart from that. I crawled on muttering ridiculously, "Give a man a chance. Give a man a chance." I began to curse myself—I don't quite know why—but I saw the rock in front and her face peering round it. I suppose I was safe, but I didn't know it and in my stupidity I had made straight for the rock when I should have

been at the side. The sight of her pulled me together and I became a human being again with even a regard for appearances. Sharply I told her not to move and tried to say naturally that I had had a bad time down there. I moved cautiously round the rock, still dreadfully apprehensive of losing all that I had gained and she caught my wrist and helped to pull me up. Between the rock and the top was easy but she wanted to make me go first. I resisted and she let me have my way.

We were safe and I sat on the ground, hoping that she would not speak to me yet. She did not but she sat down by my side and put her arm round my shoulders. It was too comforting to be thrilling and I am ashamed to say that I was shaken by sobs though I shed no tears. She patted me as though I had been a child and when I began to laugh she laughed too. Then, "It must have been dreadful," she said. I felt it was unjust that she could never know how dreadful, and yet it was horrible to think of her seeing into my mind as it had been. I said, "I wouldn't have bothered to come up if it hadn't been for you," and she didn't understand what I meant till I said, "I had a rare gruelling. Life wasn't worth it. You don't know."

"But I do know. I do understand," she said. "Why wouldn't you let me come and help?"

Argumentatively I said, "That shows you don't understand. It would have been certain death for both of us. I daresay you think I'm despicable but I'm not sure that I wasn't a hero. It's a fresh view. Do they recall their heroism with horror? Is it a bad dream? What stupidity to think of it as something jolly! These Victoria Crosses and things—do they hate the sight of them? And it was only myself I was saving, not you."

"Me, too," she said.

"And I was rude to you. What did I say? I didn't keep my manners or my breeding. Did you ever get near the breaking point? I've learnt humility."

She got up and gave me a hand. It was very cold and when I had scrambled to my knees I held it to my cheek. She suffered this awhile and then gently jerked me upwards. I stood up very shakily and stretched myself; my limbs were sore and stiff, my hands bleeding; I was covered with mud. I said, "What did you mean by saying that I was saving you too?"

She evaded the point. She said something friendly—almost polite; I don't remember the words. I knew I was losing my chance; I knew she was receding. Can a man make love when he

has just been pitiable? And I have always had a ridiculous sense of fairness. Yet there we were, alone in the world, with the mists boiling up from deep cauldrons; mist and wind and the noise of the wind. It was a simplification; we were near to one another. If I had caught her in my arms then she would not have resisted; aye, she would have accepted me joyfully. I think so; I haven't asked her. I had yet to measure the depths of her obsession. For she had her fastnesses, I knew. I was on the track of something when I said, "Was it very horrible for you up here? Did you know I was in difficulties?" She nodded, turning away and I persisted, "What were you doing—or thinking?" It seemed that I was widening the gap wilfully for it was with a sombre defiance she said, "Part of the time I was praying." It was as if she had invoked the help of a rival. I stiffened and so did she. We felt that it was time to be off. Her manner was anxious and commiserating and, of course, we were not out of our difficulties. I said, "How jolly and safe it is up here!" I took up a stone and heaved it down the gully. She cried sharply, "Don't do that." We heard it thud, thud and then there was silence. We listened intently. She said, "You shouldn't have done that"; she was agitated; we were in a flux of emotion again. "Why shouldn't I pray for

you?" she said. "It's the best I can do." And I railed against her tragic exclusiveness. I said that this Christ of hers was warping her from all that was gracious and humane. I suppose I meant that it was warping her from me. She interrupted me, crying, "Can't I have both?" We spoke in hints; we didn't formulate. Both? Him and me? Did she mean that? It was a fragmentary conversation. "I try to be kind and nice," she said and I could have laughed at the plaintive inadequacy of it; the poor girl's diction was not equal to the occasion.

She was quivering with emotion and it turned to a shiver of cold. I reproached myself and caught her icy hand in mine. These phantoms of the mind must be dismissed and we moved away, at first slowly and stiffly. Then, coming to ground almost level, I took her arm and saying, "We must get warm," forced her into a run. She resisted at first but soon we stumbled along together laughing like children. We were aimless but I was conscious of a burden to be resumed. Chance favoured us and presently, peering through the thinning mist, we saw the earth spread below us like a map. I recognised the head of Eskdale; it was gone in a moment but the way down was easy; indeed, we did not descend very far but skirted the mountain so as to strike the Hause.

We were both tired and made slow progress over the broken ground. Her reticences had come upon her again and I had not the spirit to attempt to penetrate them. We were gentle and kind to one another, like lovers estranged and hopeless whose resentment has faded. Coming down Esk Hause towards the camp we speculated about the others and were conscious of another world. I was reluctant to face it and harassed by doubts and the sense of loss. Even now—but I was extraordinarily weak and I became grotesquely conscious that I was covered with mud. I was weak and humiliated and I resented my pitifulness. Yet weakness may breed egoism and I asked Rose whether such an experience as I had had did a man good or harm. She frowned and said it was hard to put herself in my place, and then I remembered that I didn't want her to do so; I didn't want her to know. "Shall you tell them?" she said suddenly and I said that there was a good deal I should not tell them. Yet in such a case to come back to people and pretend that you have not been very far away makes you feel like a hypocrite.

We found them at the camp and just about to set off in search of us. They were making a hasty meal of anything that came handy but when they saw us approaching the kettle was put on and we all had tea together. I gave a bowdlerised version

of the adventure and Bill did a little gentle chaffing, but we were all rather quiet and serious. On our slow way to Rosthwaite—I chose the longer, easier way by Sty Head—Bill told me that we had come in looking as though we had seen a ghost. "I did see one," I said; "in fact I'm not sure that I didn't see several." He grunted interrogation but respected my reticence.

CHAPTER IX

BILL HARD HIT

We were a little flat the next day or I was, at least, and during the morning we hung about the inn and realised the sunshine. We read a little in tattered old novels abandoned by the guests, our predecessors, we played a game or two on the lawn with bowls calculated to make us think the world full of rubs, we discussed great subjects slackly. I had slept uneasily and now my mind reverted sometimes to that slimy nightmare of a gully, but the valley gave a luxury of safety and ease. We were dull but the dulness was not unmitigated; we had shapeless anticipations. To lunch was a middling distraction and it brought us nearer to something. Bill ordered a pint of beer and I imitated him; I don't know that we exactly wanted it but we felt the need of that breadth of gesture that a pint of beer stands for. We gulped and felt the better for it. Perhaps I was submerging Bill in my own emotions but it seemed that with the attitude right the feelings would follow. The beer was good and so was the sunshine and the sounds and sights of the inn.

We jogged up Grain Ghyll presently and arrived about tea-time, to be received politely. I said politely afterwards in discussing it with Bill, but he said kindly and admitted that this was rather worse. Rose had a cold and was wrapped up mightily and coddled by the others; their solicitudes pointed at me as the villain of the piece. Rose perceived that I was sensitive on this point and roused herself to the badinage that might relieve the situation. Our spirits wouldn't rise very high and Bill and I felt that we had better be off. So we concocted a project for ascending Glaramara on the way back to Rosthwaite and presently set off to scale that beautiful and boggy mountain. Our zest did not shine through us and our friends were roused to some show of compunction when we masked our languor with the conventional briskness of the start; something about seeing us to-morrow was said though it lacked definiteness. "Give 'em a rest," said Bill as soon as we were out of hearing. They watched us away again and even waved to us. They seemed pathetic standing there and I savoured the misery of a languid parting; how much better to part with high hearts and the tide at flood!

It is not much of a climb from Sprinkling Tarn to Glaramara but the number of false tops is disconcerting. We were not in the vein but we went on doggedly and it was beautiful, still evening

when we stood at last on the cairn. The immense solemnity of the twilight calmed us; standing on the heights it seemed that light itself was fading; in the valley it is the objects that grow dim. We did not talk for if our hearts were humbled we could not trust our tongues. It was as aliens that we had mounted; as comrades we trotted down the green slopes that look so beautiful from Borrowdale. Bill ordered a bottle of champagne that evening. "It's a crude means of expression, I know," he said, "but there's subtle feeling behind it; besides, I always have one bottle on a holiday, and this is the night. To-morrow we'll have our big walk."

We did, indeed, start early the next morning and breasted the mountains gallantly. We crossed the valley and ascended in turn the heights of Dale Head, Hindscarth and Robinson. It was too early for lunch at Buttermere and, besides, we had provision of sandwiches. So we set off by Sour Milk Ghyll and mounted Red Pike, lunched on the top and then came over High Stile and High Crag. It was pretty easy peak-bagging but this surmounting of successive obstacles has its exhilaration and the day was glorious with white clouds scudding high and the tops clear. We were merry and yet I think that when we set out that morning both felt that the direction was wrong; it was a relief to turn again at Buttermere. And

all the time I was calculating—I suspect Bill was too—the distance to Sprinkling Tarn and the possibility of reaching it. Coming down from High Crag we studied the map; the obvious course was by Gatesgarth home. "It looks a divil of a way round," said Bill. "You mean?"— I said. "I mean to Sprinkling Tarn, of course." When I remarked that it might be decent to call at Seathwaite and see whether any letters had come for them he snorted. "You chaps feel so much safer with a secondary, conventional reason. But perhaps I'm not doing you justice. You winked?" "Practically," I said. And then we set off on a straight, cross-country course that made us sweat before we were done with it. We passed under Haystacks and took the rough way between Brandreth and Grey Knotts. From the ridge we descended directly upon Seathwaite by another Sour Milk Ghyll and scrambled across the young Derwent. Inconsistently Bill said, "If there are no letters it would be only decent to go and tell them so." Strange to say there were letters.

By this time we were tired but we decided on the longer, familiar route by Sty Head. "More suitable for the dogged stage," said Bill and we recalled the idea of pilgrims, this time doggedly approaching the shrine, concerned with thoughts of the night's lodging and the coming meal. The

talk flagged. "Keep it up," groaned Bill; "now's the time for fierce argument. I don't believe in it as a rule but when you're tired—and one can have too much even of Stockley Bridge. Yes, it's difficult to get oblivion in bits as you want it." We were both a little nervous again, I think, about our reception. I assured him that the danger was effusiveness rather than coldness; that they had just a little to make up to us for yesterday. Bill had become quite gloomy. "It's all right for you," he said. "You're a respectable citizen, you've got a clean record. D'you know I've an awful doubt when I meet her—I've a sort of expectation that she'll point to the door and tell me to get out?"

"There's no door here," I said; "it's no place for narrow judgments."

"I hate these damned mountains," he cried. He shook his fist at them childishly; he stood glaring at the fell side and the distant heights. "They're there all the time, they're fixed, they're implacable. They're like her."

We walked on in silence. Then he stopped again. "I'm tired," he said. "I'm going back."

I said, "The letters?"

"You take them."

He took them out of his pocket while I hesitated and one fell to the ground. He stooped to pick it

up and rose slowly, looking at it. "This is from Darley," he said.

"Anything strange in that?"

"I happen to know the handwriting."

I did not reply and he put the letters in his pocket again and moved on; I followed and saw that his hand kept going to his pocket. Over his shoulder he said, "May one examine the outside of other people's letters?"

"What's the good?" I said.

And presently he stopped and faced me. "Fenn," he said, "I want to open this letter and read it."

"You can't do that," I said. I was astonished and afraid.

"I'm not so sure that I can't," he said.

It was not a case for platitudes about decency and the public school spirit. "Stop a bit," I said; "there's some danger of a big mistake. You may hurt her badly."

"Who?"

He had the letter out and was examining it. "For a girl of that sort," he said, "she writes rather well."

"You must not do it," I said.

"Not gentlemanlike?" he sneered.

The thing was too preposterous. One speaks a madman fair and Bill had a streak of insanity.

"Let's argue the point," he said; "it'll pass the time. Just what we needed to forget our weariness."

It didn't admit of argument but I humoured him by asking him to state his case. I was beginning to feel safer; he really had alarmed me. "My case," he said, "is simply an overwhelming curiosity."

"That's no case."

"I said 'overwhelming.'"

"It doesn't overwhelm. You've got a will."

"The will sings small before passion."

"Curiosity isn't a passion."

"Then it's a disease. I'm mastered by a disease."

"This is a matter of conduct. In discussing it I think we must presuppose sanity."

"What's logic to a man on fire?"

My apprehensions were returning and I changed my ground.

"Bill," I said, "what's the point? Why should you want to see her letter? I can't understand you. It's perfectly shocking. People don't do such things. And you've no right now—you're out of this——"

"Out of it?" he cried. "Do you know what's in this letter?" He had it out again and was brandishing it.

"Come, come," I said, "I'm the neutral party. Give it to me. Proceed with your argument."

I was watching his hands closely and now I made a dive at the letter and missed it. I caught him round the body, pinning his arms. I had delayed my convincing argument too long and now I shouted in his ear, "She'll let you see it, you fool." We swayed together on the stony, narrow path and fell with him uppermost. My head came with a shattering crack against a rock and I lost the thread of things for a moment. Then I sat up and saw him sitting there with the torn envelope and the letter in his hand. He wasn't reading it and at first I thought that I must have been unconscious for some time and that he had read it. His eyes did not meet mine but he said, "Not hurt much, old chap, I hope"; it was exactly in the tone of Hamlet when the ghost is there and he says to his mother, "How is't with you, lady?" I made myself more comfortable with my back against a rock and now that the thing was done it didn't look quite so serious. "After all," I said, "what's a broken seal? Not in the same category as a broken head." I put up my hand to it and brought away a smear of blood. I rather wanted him to see the blood but he didn't look my way. "I find I've a sort of delicacy about it, after all," he said. He hadn't read the letter,

then. I said, "I think she'll understand." He said, "Who?" and I seemed to recollect that he had said that before. Then he said, "Surely a man has a right to see his wife's letters," and I thought I was wandering or he was; I was in no condition to appreciate irony. I began to wonder whether a wife's letters were those she sent out or those she received; I was in a state of muddled receptivity; I was unguarded and simple; things didn't matter enormously.

I got up, feeling queer, and sat down again. Then Bill pocketed the letter and came over to me with solicitude and quite charmingly without fuss. There was no foolish self-reproach about him and I was ready enough to accept my broken head as a trivial part of something bigger. It wasn't very bad and we soon got going again; he was careful with me and we were pretty slow. I felt enormously glad that he hadn't read the letter.

We found the tent empty and we stood outside it staring rather blankly at mere shapes of things. Gloomily Bill said, "They're not far away. It was a point of honour not to expect us." And soon they came trooping round a little hill. They had seen us coming and had hidden "for fun." But fun was not in the ascendant. "You looked so strange and mournful there that we just came out," said Rose. I told them of our long walk.

"And after a day among those inhuman hills you want people," I said. "We felt that we must have people."

"People!" said Miss Crozier. "Not us?"

"Well," I said, "one mustn't make it too emphatic."

We were all dubious, near to sincerities; we stood regarding one another enquiringly. It seemed that the holiday was over and that explanations and adjustments were coming. Bill took the letters from his pocket and handed them round. There was one for each and I was impressed by the absence of anything like arrangement in the distribution. He did not give Rose hers first or last but where it came, in the middle; he did not exhibit the torn envelope nor conceal it. Rose looked at it and then, enquiringly, at him. "I'll explain," he said.

I don't know how much the others saw or surmised. They were compliant and I led them away. We strolled about and talked absent-mindedly while Rose and Bill stood and had it out. I did not watch them but I couldn't help glancing from time to time. I found myself considering them pictorially. I asked Miss Crozier if she didn't think they were astonishingly "in the landscape." She bent an intelligent gaze on them and said, "I think I see what you mean." They were grave

and still and unposed; they had forgotten us. I am not by nature jealous, I think; I hate the open competition for the woman; but as she and Bill stood there I was dismayed. I was to know presently, as I dimly surmised now, that this letter widened the gulf between them but I was wondering whether I had ever been so near to her as he was now. They were in the landscape but they were small and human, they were alone. There was no question of love between them now but I was outside their deep preoccupation.

And yet presently Rose turned and called me and when Gertie and Miss Crozier made to come too she waved them back; I retain a vision of them turning away rather sadly and humbly. Good, decent girls.

So I joined the two and learned the contents, or some of them, of Jessie's letter. I think it was too intimate to be shown; it was from one woman to another. Reuben Harper had "jibbed" — Bill used this expression and it sounded rather horrible in his spiritless tone—and the question of marriage was in abeyance. A mere curiosity got the better of me for a moment and I asked Bill whether he had known what was in the letter. He said, "Well, I had a sort of notion. I saw Harper the other day." And then he said, pathetically, "I've enjoyed these few days, though." I do believe

that he said this partly on our account. It was greatly disconcerting to think that something had been gnawing at Bill while we had been so jolly and he wanted to reassure us. Rose and I stood there just looking at him.

Reuben had revolted, then, but it was not baseness or weakness; I was to see something of this fanatic presently. After pondering and praying and so on he had come to the conclusion that concealment was evil; he had put it to Jessie that he could not marry her till after the child was born; then he would do it gladly. And it seemed that Jessie, in her letter, harped vindictively upon this word "gladly"; her poor emphatic ironies had been kindled by it. She would never marry him now, she said, and, indeed, one perceived a dreadful discordancy in the idea of a union between the weak, rebellious woman and an implacable man. But the man was unexplored; one wanted to talk to Reuben Harper; at least he must be interesting.

They gave me an outline of the position rather disjointedly. Rose said, "Mr. Campion will tell you everything." I suppose that he would have done that anyhow and I wondered for a moment why she had called me in now. There was not any specific explanation but I saw her look at him and she looked at me. It was an appeal, I think. She wanted to help him, of course, but to help

deeply, generously. And with profound exultation I perceived that in this great difficulty she turned naturally to me, that we were to share the burden together. I took hold of Bill's arm and I think that pleased her. She saw it as symbolic and friendly too. "Time to be off," I said and, indeed, the night was coming. "We meet next at Darley?" I suggested tentatively and hinted at the possibility of travelling home together. It seemed that this would not be convenient and neither party pressed it, but Rose told us that she was likely to be a sort of fixture at Darley; she was to governess young Blundells, Gertie's little sisters. Miss Crozier and Gertie, hovering afar, were called down and we said "Good-bye." We had started and the physical part of the journey loomed before me. I stopped and said to Bill, "We've had nothing to eat." He said, "Never mind," rather impatiently but I turned back. "You haven't such a thing as a bun?" I called facetiously and explained that we had not had any tea. They were all commiseration and there was a bustle of preparation. We declined to stay and set off down the Pass eating hunks of cake. It served to take the edge off other things besides our appetites.

And then began a talk with Bill that lasted, with intermissions, till about two o'clock in the morning. I don't know how we should have got home without

it for when it flagged we found ourselves dreadfully tired. It did not flag much and it was easy enough to set Bill going again. At Sty Head Tarn it was nearly dark and I tried to introduce an interlude, appealing to Bill for appreciation of the ghostliness of that lovely pool. I think I had a notion of qualifying his vexation with the eternal romances but he was not in a mood for even the higher platitudes. Our progress was a dogged stumble but much of it was subconscious; we cursed and winced sometimes when the hard fragments of an irrelevant world obtruded but we were living in the spirit. For Bill interested me, he absorbed me, and certainly he absorbed himself. The great and splendid qualities of his egoism triumphed and he surveyed the world of his experiences while he stumbled and swore. He was full of himself: "It's my turn now," he seemed to say; I'm not sure that he didn't use the very words and once or twice he dipped humorously toward me as the sympathetic auditor.

How did he conceive it all? As apology, defence, justification? It was at least an exposure. He made a kind of map of his life, putting in the places as they occurred to him. It was a jumble but it tended to something like order. He was a hedonist and capable of generous altruism; a criminal that could idealise justice. He was nobly

illogical, he never attempted to make a case; he was the case. And though the world had him down he never whined; perhaps he might say, "I'll be even with you yet."

No, it was hardly an attempt to make out a case; and yet, presently, I perceived, by turns and hints and phrases, that it had a direction. Instinctively it was addressed to her; it was, indeed, a rehearsal. He could never say to her all that he was saying to me now but any reticences would be on her account, not his. He might spare her the cruel affront of his nakedness but he was too proud for deception; my heart contracted at the thought that deception is no part of despair. I think I was unconscious of any gratification in relieved jealousy. With Bill I was never near to Rose; my kinship to him kept me afar; we were outside together. And now, sometimes, he ranged me on his side and for the moment it was our confession and not just his. He cried out against "this Christianity," its austerity, denials, its narrow judgments. "Puritanism's a fair deduction from it," he said. "There's its condemnation. Did you ever see anything more terrible than that girl's repressions? She ought to be a free, open creature. She is; she can be. And then she thinks of a pale figure on the Cross — it isn't even a bloody one — and the

mortification of the flesh. If she marries it'll be an anæmic curate."

I think he was ashamed of this last remark for he muttered, "She's too good; it's she that's fine and she gives it all a kind of case. Tremendous contrasts, too. Rose! that's her name. Thank heaven, it isn't Lily!"

"Oh, let's look wider!" he shouted and suddenly he became conscious of his surroundings. "Look, Fenn," he said, "look up at the sky—see those dark hills. Don't make so much of some far-off little amorous adventure. I know, I know. Yes, I know all you can say. I daresay you are a better man than I but it's not because of some trumpery repression."

And I knew how useless it was to attempt to pin him down to social, humanitarian theory. I hated the words with their connotation of political platitude—useless weapons against his untrammelled rhetoric. He was raging at the end of a tether. In his heart he knew that he had to be judicious and circumspect, that he was going to behave decently in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. He might have realised this when he said, "Our holiday's about over"; I don't think it was just a change of subject.

On the valley level we jogged along in a kind of dull harmony. Bill tried cynicism. "There are

many women in the world, Fenn," he said, "and I don't see why we should make such a fuss about one of them. Juxtaposition counts for a lot. And there's a supreme coquetry in her reticences. She's a myth; we've made her. I believe I've more chance than you now. The sinner that repents, you know. A much more attractive figure than the just heathen. No, but I'll tell you," and he became earnest again; "it's not only her reticences but mine. D'you suppose I think of her as I do of other women? I head myself off—I don't dare —that's her power; she's so exacting. She's damnably pretty and gay and alluring and yet she holds you off—even in imagination. To marry a woman like that would be folly. We're getting the best she can give us, Fenn."

He was trifling again but we did the last stretch from Seatoller to Rosthwaite grimly enough. We wanted our dinner, we wanted rest, we wanted a roof to our heads. A change of shoes and a wash was sufficient preparation for our meal which we took in the coffee-room alone. We drank our wine with comradely intent, we had a sort of satisfaction, even of comfort, that was not all physical. Bill would not leave the coffee-room, declining contact with the other guests, and as the maid kept peering in to see whether we had finished he called her to clear away the debris and begone. She did so

though, perhaps, it was hardly in the bargain that he should smoke cigars there; subsequently we undertook to see lights out. I recall a period of extreme sleepiness and longing for an easy chair while Bill, too much excited for such weakness, poured on, touching on many things and never resting on one. And then, roused by something he said, with the crass emphasis of a suddenly awakened man, I cried out, "Why! You'll be a father soon."

Of course this was not the first time it had occurred to him but he looked excessively startled. "Yes, yes," he said, "but it's hard for me to get at that; it seems so shockingly irrelevant. And yet is it less so with you smug fellows who have the Church or the State behind you? You're a potential father, you'll be one some day and then you'll conceive it all as high and holy and beautiful and so on. A good lusty impulse painted to look like a Sacrament. My son's as good as yours."

"I'm the last man to deny it," I said.

"Oh, you're damned liberal, I know; but you condescend! You're a prig at heart, Fenn, and you're mean enough to disguise it perfectly. I've no evidence against you. I know you're a good chap but I dislike to see you there all so proper in Abraham's bosom. That stuff's got into my head. I think I'm in the quarrelsome

stage of inebriety. I'd rather be friendly and maudlin. A large whisky and soda might do it."

He ordered one, and tauntingly offered me a lemon squash. "You got home on me there," he said; "a son!"

"Why a son?" I asked.

"Because," he said, thumping the table, "a daughter would be too horrible. I can't face that. I couldn't face her. D'you think I haven't thought of it? I don't mind a son. A son would be one of us some day. And I don't want any of your hushing up. That fellow's right enough—from his own point of view—that joiner—let each man claim his child. But he must be a hard brute. I believe in sentiment with women."

He touched on a lower aspect of the affair; its reception by Darley. "How vastly they'll enjoy it," he said; "and I don't blame 'em. I should enjoy it. But the question is—How? I don't think I shall care much about their din. She, poor thing"—he gloomed a moment—"but, do you know, when I think of how this would be taken in Darley by the righteous it makes me feel a good man. I feel rather smug and virtuous myself. Not you. Not your kind of righteousness. You'll be good. You'll be jolly good. You reconcile me to the world, Fenn."

"Got to the maudlin stage?" I said.

"Ah, well! Why not?" said poor Bill.

He was luxuriating in the case and, having ceased to be sleepy, I was feeling tired. With some instinct of protection against a flood of words I said, "What's your next step?"

This pulled him up. He really didn't want to discuss practical affairs at all. I think he didn't want to commit himself to anything with me. Bill was a generous soul but every man has some reserves of canniness. Rose was always in his mind, presiding vaguely over all these uncertainties; everything was vastly uncertain and Bill's impulsive sincerities made him a slippery fellow. He muttered something about things being infernally complicated. I think he was conscious that he had a big part to play and wasn't quite sure of his reading. He got back to that matter of fatherhood—it had a great attraction for him—and it even brought him round to the question of public schools and the possible disadvantages of the bar sinister. He was not quite muddled but he was very far from explicit. Conscious of his evasions, he placated himself by facing the fact of them. "The next step?" he said; "we don't talk of that to-night." There was an air of profound reason in his reticence. He fingered an empty glass and rang the bell, but nobody came. "Enough for the day," he said. The old chap

was deliciously comic. But he didn't, so to speak, escape himself and with a deprecating grin he added, " I like things big and vague. Damn your limits." Yet he wanted to be precise about trains and when we should arrive at Darley; particularly, I think, he wanted to know when Rose was likely to arrive. The search for a railway guide brought us to the little bar and snuggery where we found the landlord dozing under a dim light; he hadn't trusted us to see the lights out. Bill talked to him with the greatest affability and forgot about the trains. The man blinked and yawned, gradually regaining full consciousness and presently the two were in an animated discussion about sheep and dogs. Bill was rather big yet but he took the landlord's points shrewdly. He invited him to a drink but the landlord was a teetotaler; enormous pressure induced him to partake of ginger ale while Bill was served with whisky and soda; not to spoil sport and my thirst being already slaked I had some sticky, sweet cherry brandy. They discussed mountaineering, fox-hunting on the fells, recent legislation, the Grasmere play. It was a borrowing from the night. We took our candles at last and as we mounted the stairs Bill whispered to me in a loud voice that the landlord was Shakespearean; it was charitable to suppose that his teetotalism was only the precaution of an old toper. We paused

outside my door to discuss Shakespeare's minor characters and Bill said some brilliant, illuminating things; I forget them. I checked him when he began to talk about *Hamlet*. I was a fool for he was in the mood now to talk passionately. I had had enough. The fellow oppressed me; I wanted to be alone and I don't think he did. "Just to get the proportions right," he pleaded; "old Shakespeare makes us sing small." I said good-night relentlessly. "Well, well," he said, "it's all damned exciting, old chap. I've not bored you?" He set off along the passage and then paused and half turned to say, "A bit due to me, wasn't there?" It was his apology for the evening.

Bill had certainly been overwhelming and I was glad to recover myself in the quiet room. It had no features, it was walls and plain furniture with a dank, country smell but it was privacy. The ripple of the beck—soon to become part of the Derwent—drew me to the window and I gazed into a dim obscurity of trees; the sky was clouded. Here, too, were no features; it was profoundly night. I was thankful for that environment and yet presently I put out my head and gazed blindly southwards, up the valley. She was there in the heart of the night and somewhere beyond her was that horrible gully. And yet that had brought us together. She had said, she had intimated what

my heart desired. Or had she? I was strangely confused about it. I wanted explanations and this wasn't the time. No, it was not explanations I wanted but another chance. I was reluctant to date our understanding from that incident. I had been pitiful, pitiable; I would not come to her that way. Big things had intervened and to speak to her now seemed a disloyalty to Bill. But the future was with us and all the golden chances. We were safe in the night and even while we slept there would be dawn among the hills.

CHAPTER X

WORDS AND WORDS

So back to Darley we came and it seemed that morosely, penitentially, we were taking up the burden of life again. Between the holiday and Darley intervened a half-day's work in Manchester; a dreary initiation. Bill and I travelled out together and, controlled by the mighty spell of habit, we seemed to have taken up pre-Borrowdale relations. We glowered at one another suspiciously over the tops of our evening papers and last night might have been a hundred years ago. Yet I shuddered when Bill said, "Any news?" to a Darley man in the carriage and I record with shame that he winked at me; I felt that there was something wrong with Bill, something I couldn't stand. That wink was abominable and yet I suppose it was only a touch of nervous bravado. Poor Bill missed the mark again at Darley where, amid the station bustle, he encountered Tassell and smote him on the back with boisterous salutation. It was too clear that Tassell didn't like it but Bill grasped his nettle; he tried to detain

him with a capital story about a bishop. Tassell, agitated about luggage or such like, applauded the story midway and rushed off. Bill would have followed but I dragged him away.

It was late September; we had returned to the fall of the leaf. In the austere mountain regions that we had left this season is hardly marked; it is a slight affair of the valleys. At Darley, too, we have our hills—our beloved hills—but now they appeared sullen and crushed. The trees ruled the season here and stark winter, bare branches, would be better than this. I write from recollection and this is coloured, I suppose, by what came later. For was I not a happy lover? I think I doubted sometimes whether I was quite normal and sane. Rose's arm had embraced me and I had accepted it as a child that is hurt takes a caress from its nurse. If she would love me I was even capable of humility and yet I was quick to resent the illusions of pity. By all the adages the scrupulous lover is a fool but this was a rare creature not to be rudely trapped, not to be captured by masterfulness, and certainly not to be melted by appeal. I am not always cold and hesitating; I am not incapable of passion.

I find it impossible to explain. Explanations can only heighten the incredible. The strangeness of circumstances kept the vernal, the sexual

in restraint. I suppose I was sometimes jealous of Bill Campion but it was the whole thing, the group of us and the coming events that possessed my mind. And in the group Bill was dominant; I thought of him more than of Rose. She came upon me in gusts but I was not stimulated to action. I could not make love to her with Bill in this dreadful quandary; there was no formal reason against it but I must spare him that.

Another figure comes on the scene — Reuben Harper. Rose told me that, at first, he was unapproachable. His quaint phrase was that he "could not discuss the matter with a lady." She didn't know what to do and, indeed, the affair was in a state in which the wisest outsider could not know what to do. Jessie, Reuben, Bill were all unknown quantities. We could only guess at what, in their hearts, they wanted; they must declare themselves and even expose themselves before judicious friends could be much help.

I think this view of the matter comforted Rose a little; her prayers for light were only rather premature. She had mentioned me to Reuben Harper and his "What's he got to do with it?" was a mild enough remonstrance. He did not refuse to see me nor consent. I think he would have refused but for a strain of pride which forbade him to refuse anything difficult and forbidding. He and I were

on rather pleasantly respectful terms with one another.

I called at the cottage where he lived with his sister and found them having tea together in a room that opened out of the street. I would have backed out but he would not have that. He invited me to a cup of tea and his sister rose to make preparation; it was a stiff courtesy. I said, "I want to have a talk with you," and he replied, "I don't see that it's any good." His sister stood by the dresser listening; a dark, sombre creature, something like him but larger in make and with an expression between grim and placid. Rose had told me that she knew everything but I felt it impossible to speak before her. I think she desired to be in at our talk but her traditions, too, were all against my discussing such a matter with a woman. I think she would have discussed it fast enough if she had been roused, but I was all dulness and discretion and I think that these two had talked themselves to silence. We were mighty polite and no more and yet the woman was interesting. When she was not speaking she brooded darkly and I had a vision, commiseratingly, of the fragile Jessie Bland between an upper and a nether millstone.

Miss Harper talked to me gravely and sensibly, without defiance and certainly without obsequious-

ness. I think that public affairs of the village made her theme. I looked about me discreetly. It was a decent room, avoiding, on the whole, the garish extremes of modern cottage decoration. There was a fair-sized bookcase which contained, besides devotional and religious books, an instalment of the "Everyman" library. All manner of masterpieces were there; I read the titles of a few of them and they were queerly irrelevant to the occasion — Milton's Poems, The Orations of Demosthenes, Newman's Apologia, a volume of Restoration Plays. This last item was puzzling. Was it just a chance or had the devout young man thought it his duty to probe into this old wickedness? Perhaps he had had thoughts of a liberal education and overheard some chance recommendation. The aspiring young man struggling with unrelated masterpieces is a pathetic spectacle; it was natural that, having stuff in him, he should fall back upon religion and take it hard. Perhaps I might have helped him; our comrades are dying all around us for want of a little help.

I asked him to call to see me or to come out now for a walk. He hesitated, looking at his sister. I looked at her too and I couldn't see that anything passed between them. He said he would call at my rooms that night. I stayed a few minutes longer. They both rose at my departure. I

bowed to Miss Harper and she gave me a slight, awkward inclination of her head. I was not encouraged to shake hands and did not attempt it.

So my sitting-room became again the centre of this drama. I made the usual conventional offers of drink and smoke and they were declined. Reuben Harper sat stiffly, cap in hand, regarding me with an oppressive dulness of expectancy. And really, I didn't know how to begin. I hadn't rehearsed the scene and I'm sure he hadn't. We watched each other and I was irresolute and hopeless. He looked immovable and I would have agreed to the uselessness of our talk but that the point of honour drove me on. It was for me, if I could, to free Bill from an impossible situation and if I was his rival so much the more must I try to do it. Such, roughly, was my thought, but—to do me justice and Bill and all our class—it was qualified, too, by commiseration; I was not here to connive at baseness.

He said at last: "It's no good," and made a slight, impatient movement. I said, "It's no good our talking if we aren't plain with one another. I'm going to suggest that you're just selfish over this affair.

"How so?" he said.

"I'll ask you a question. Do you—are you"—I boggled over the great word—"do you love

her?" And it was strange for me to be asking him this for, indeed, I did not know what I meant. We talk of love as of oxygen or iron, as a thing definitely of qualities and each of us has a string of emphatic platitudes about it. I loved Rose and I suppose that at the back of my mind there was some such inquiry as this: Are you to Jessie as I to Rose? Can I translate your feelings into mine or mine into yours? Is an appeal from me to you possible?

He did not speak for some time and then he said, haughtily, "What right have you to speak to me of this?" It was an opening; perhaps the best I could have had. "I've none," I said; "no right. But I know—I think I know—what it is for a man to be alone with a big thing like this in his mind. Even to talk it over with a friend——"

"A friend?" he said.

"If you'll let me——"

"You are a friend of Mr. Campion's?"

"Yes."

"You can't be both."

"Why not?"

And then he said, "I'm not alone," and my mind travelled slowly to the sombre woman sitting over her needlework — so I pictured her — in the cottage a hundred yards away. He was not a weak man but he had to justify himself to her as to a

part of himself; I could imagine magnanimities in the fellow but they would be clogged by resentments that he and his sister had in common. And, indeed, we ask too much of such men in our friendly advances. They have ceased to be obsequious and that is well; we cannot expect our kindly expeditions into their lives to be met without resentment.

I said, "Mr. Campion is my friend. When a man is once that you don't go back. Suppose that he does ill, disgraces himself, lowers himself — suppose that — d'you think I'd throw him over? Have you ever had a friend? Don't think I mean that I'm his superior; I'm not. But I hate what he's done. I hate things he does. That's not all. You must take it at its best. And what's true of friendship is true of love."

"You think it makes no difference?" he said.

"I can't say that. You never get anything good in this world that just remains good."

"Ah, well," he said; "it's all words."

It sounded like the cry of the inarticulate man, but he had fenced so far and I must make him speak. I said, "There are several things to be done or not to be done. As you say, I've no right to ask you to discuss them with me. What's best for her? What's possible for her?"

"What's right?" he said.

"Very well. What's right?"

"Mr. Fenn," he said gravely, "I'm closer to this than you are. It's very kind of you to take an interest in us, very kind"—the emphasis became ironical—"but I can't see how you can help or what you've got to do with it."

"Of course," I said, rather hotly, "I'm interfering and I've no right except that every human being has the right to try to help another."

"Is it me you're helping?" he said. And then he added, "Very well; I'll listen to what you have to say. What have we all to do?"

It placed me in an impossible position. Here was I, all undecided, ignorant of the depths and even the direction of their convictions, their emotions, and invited to produce a scheme of conduct. I wanted a good, frank talk with the man to help to clarify my own opinions. I must say something to take advantage of such opportunity as he gave me and I began a rather rambling exposition of my own hazy ideas on a position I did not clearly apprehend. Honestly, I tried to put the case for the spirit against the flesh, for love against the ban of the world and the resentments of the lover. He listened silently, with an expression that might be respectful incredulity, and then he said, "Where do you get those notions?"

"Get them?"

"Are they born in you? Do you learn them out of a book?"

"One's ideas and opinions grow."

"Grow?" he said thoughtfully. "Well, I suppose you in your wisdom and your free-thinking will scorn my ways. Mind, I don't scorn yours. I know what scepticism is. But I've kept it at bay. When I want help I call upon—I go to"—he paused for he was not glib with his great words either—"I've the habit of prayer. Yes, and I read the Bible. As to that I've sometimes thought it's not much good when you're in trouble. You don't know where to look. There's that old way they had of opening at a venture—and you come on something about chariots and horses, perhaps, or a list of kings. I've found it disappointing. Yet to read a bit calms you; it does that. But prayer—you think that silly?"

"No, no."

"But you don't pray?"

"No."

"It's strange. There are times when I can't. But it's my only way to see things clearly when I'm in a mess."

He paused and I said something sympathetic and sententious about the value of referring the particular case to general principles; perhaps it wasn't

quite so arid as this. I know it was inadequate and rather stupid. He did not reply to this directly, but he said, "I find it hard to talk of these things to you."

He was silent again and perhaps I was wise in giving him time, certainly in refraining from further attempts to rationalise. With a sternness that betrayed his effort he said, "I prayed over this till light came. A sort of light. Was I sure? Who can be sure? We can only do our best."

His diction was singularly pure. One might have expected the *clichés* of the preacher or the elder, but it seemed that his deliberate sincerity found the right words. There was nothing to brush aside. Rather hopelessly I said, "Then, what was your decision?"

He paused again. He had made up his mind to speak and he did speak, but with reluctance. He said, "Her sin must not be hidden."

I chafed furiously against his solemn gravity, his immutable pronouncement; impatiently I said, "Why not? Give your reasons," though I could have given some myself. He said, "I can only tell you that I believe it's God's will."

"God's will," I said, "or your own implacable nature."

He said, "It must work through my nature, I suppose."

I had no case and, indeed, from what I had heard Jessie Bland was as implacable as he; I have called her a weak woman but it seems that every one of us is capable of stiffening into a mould. Our talk was useless and impertinent yet I would not have missed it. And I was very curious about the man. Was he a lover at all? I put the question to him brusquely and he pondered it, but did not reply. He might be frank about his religion but he could not speak of his love.

"Come, come!" I said; "a great misfortune has happened to her. She wants help. From you, surely, above all. What can you do for her? Recite some cast-iron rules of conduct? Threaten her with the wrath of God? Are you a man?"

He raised his hand as if to clutch at his head and abandoned the gesture, he took out a handkerchief and put it back again; small, spasmodic movements were mastered and he stood calm again. Then he said, "It all seems simple to you?"

He stared at me and I shook my head. It was far from simple and, whatever I might say, he had some sort of guiding principle while I had none. I was sadly in want of a principle or a policy. I was torturing him needlessly, it seemed, and my compunction drove me to acknowledge my weakness. "You're as likely to be right as I am," I said; "I'm full of doubts."

"Then why——" he said and his speech trailed out as he looked at me. He was too magnanimous to press such an advantage. But he had sunk to an impenetrable taciturnity, he would not talk again. He stood there and did not go, and I suppose that he must have had some dim expectation that somehow help would come; at least, he must have come to me with some vestige of hope. And as we stood there came a tap at my window.

I was startled and yet I knew what it was. Bill was in the little garden and wanted to come in. The tap was repeated and Harper said, "There's somebody knocking at your window." As we looked at one another he divined who it was and said harshly, "I'll go." The door bell rang and we stared at each other while Mrs. Gee's steps went slowly along the passage. We both stood stiffly while Bill was ushered in. He paused at the door and then bowed to Harper, who did not move. Bill advanced into the room. "Of course I did not know——" he said. I didn't know what to do and thought it best to wait for a hint from them. We stood there tense and aimless and, ridiculously, it recalled a famous "three men scene" in a bad old play that I had seen lately. I think Bill was very much alive to the dramatic aspect. He said, "Perhaps I'd better go," but he didn't want to. He sighted my box of cigars

on the mantelpiece, took one and lit up. We watched him intently.

My commiseration for Harper contended with the comedy of Bill's attitude. I resented it but it was vastly amusing. He was a model of discretion, of course, but it was a comic discretion; as he puffed gravely at his cigar I could see that he was enjoying the situation. Reuben Harper stood his ground dourly and there was no question of violence or assault; he was too serious for that. I felt that it was impossible to explain one to the other, to find common ground; I just waited for some kind of explosion. Suddenly Harper said to me, "Good evening," and made for the door. I did not try to prevent him but Bill raised his hand and said, "Mr. Harper!" Harper glared menacingly for a moment and then looked past him, but he stopped. Bill stood there and I had the notion that he had forgotten his lines, that we should hear the prompter's voice. I am not fair to Bill.

But he spoke at large and eloquently. I can't recall his phrasing; I was watching Harper and feeling its inadequacy. Bill condemned himself roundly, he exonerated the woman, he touched things lightly and, as far as might be, without offence. If fine words had been wanted all might have been well. And he made a real attempt to penetrate to the mind

of the gloomy figure before him — there was something humane in his appeal. He did face things; he came at last to the question, "Well, what's to be done?" and Harper's eyes came back to him. And then Bill threw his cold cigar into the grate and positively clutched his reluctant opponent; he took hold of him by the elbows. "Harper," he said—and the use of the bare name was an appeal for equality—"who's to marry her? You or I? Who's best? Can I make her happy or can you? I'll do what's right. Decide. Ask Fenn; ask——" He looked round, he looked through the walls of the room.

Harper shook himself free and stood thinking. "You talk well and I won't say you don't mean it. I suppose if I was a proper man I'd smash you or try. I'm religious; I'm a poor religious creature and control myself. At times I wish I wasn't. Well—who's to marry her? you say. I am, if she will. But I'll not be father to your child. I'll fend for it. It's hers and I'll treat it as my own. But I'll not be its father. That's final." And then it occurred to him that this was not as he had conceived his refusal, that this was mere primitive man and not the outcome of his prayers. He was not a man to parade the shibboleths of his religion but he would not conceal it. I think it was with some effort that he brought it

in. "I've other thoughts that you'll hardly understand," he said. "You mayn't believe it, but there's such a thing as the will of God."

He left us with that and we did not try to detain him. Bill shrugged his shoulders. "One of these all-or-nothing men," he said; "a kind of Brand. Think of that poor girl married to him—or married to me? Which is worse? I begin to believe in morals—in looking far ahead."

I said, "He's capable of tenderness. I don't think he'd be hard with her."

"Oh, yes!" said Bill. "He'd forgive and make allowance for the poor sinner. He's one of these damned fools who won't accept facts. A hard fellow. Fine in his way, no doubt. It's like beating against rock. Fenn, where am I? I'm dashed if I know. I've no aim now. I'm just tossed about. I think I want to cut the thing and go away."

He fumbled with my cigar box and didn't take one; he lit a cigarette, puffed and threw it down. He was dejected. "I thought I was clear of the damned thing," he said. "I was ready to be magnanimous and all that, and then this fellow Harper came in and saved everything — so it seemed. And the ridiculous part of it is that he's capable of doing the big thing and going on with it. I couldn't. I know I couldn't. I can't settle down to magnanimity—I can only do a burst of it.

These crude chaps — these hot gospellers can, I suppose. But then the fool brings in his punctilio. And she has her punctilio. I doubt if she'll marry him at all. So that I—Fenn, you remember that play the other night, where the girl said 'I want to marry somebody'? The people laughed and thought it flippancy. But they're like that, aren't they? These girls are not enlightened. They're not up in the liberal ideas. I hardly know her. If she don't marry him whom can she marry but me? It would be simpler and better if she just made him marry her; or me. If she railed at one of us in the street. What a mess!"

I gave him a little of the obvious worldly wisdom: no good beginning what you can't carry through and so on. He didn't listen much. "You see," he said, "this is an infernal nuisance for me. For her—Jessie Bland—it's tragedy. If I married her I should always be slipping away from it somehow. I should get away from it. But I think it would still be tragedy for her."

"You mustn't do it," I said.

"Fenn," he cried, "wouldn't you be vastly relieved to have me out of the way? D'you never think of me as a rival? Damn you, d'you think I'm negligible? You're too smug with your justness and your fair-mindedness. I'm as good as you. I'm more amusing. You're a fool to think

yourself secure. Purity! what the devil's the good of purity? I say — is their religion the same? I mean — what's in common? Did you think of that when he was talking? I mean that fellow and Rose. Yes, Rose. There's a sort of hardness in both of them, and they look through you and away beyond you. It gives her a sort of charm. She's impregnable and mysterious. You think I oughtn't to talk about her—to use her name?"

I let him talk and he didn't press for any reply. He went out into the night moodily, but with his old humour he said that he hadn't enjoyed the evening. It was his notion that if you lived the proper zestful life you would enjoy all, good and bad, pleasure and pain. "It's nonsense," he had said, "to pretend that the death of your best friend is all misery." But now, as he would say, he couldn't get going properly; he was harassed with mere questions of conduct. "Policing oneself," he called it, for he would maintain that only semi-barbarous folk were concerned with questions of conduct though prigs attempted to make a cult of moral refinements; it was annoying for a man like him to be brought back to these primitive things. He went out into the night and left me melancholy. The house repelled me; there was nothing there better than my own thoughts and I was tired of them. The obvious thing was to go

over the late scene again and again and I dreaded that. I took a turn up the road and the mild autumn night gave me a slight sensuous pleasure. Indistinguishable scents were abroad and it was a quiet, hushed world with no cause for action. The consolation of night comes to the irresolute, the laggardly; there is a merciful respite from the call to action. Something must be done and it passed my wit to determine what. To-morrow I would see Rose.

And here I was, a tame lover, concerning myself with other people's affairs and, it seemed, without time or inclination for my own. The lover who professes a perpetual fervour is an impostor, but one does not halt on the brink, one does not fail to put it to the touch. But I could not speak to her yet, though all this perturbation should have brought us together. I could not just now announce to Bill the happy issue of my affairs. I thought she would understand that or sometimes I thought it. I had no clear vision of her then and all my sympathies would not take me into her mind. I lingered long about the road and the little garden. I hated to go in and concentrate on myself. The night was wide and peaceful. At last the habit of going in prevailed and gently I closed the door on the night. It had calmed me; the consciousness of it remained.

CHAPTER XI

MAN IS A SPIRIT

I LOOKED out for Rose the next evening and intercepted her as she was coming away from Jessie Bland. She was jaded and showed no eagerness, though I felt her wistful desire for help. And yet I resented a little the detachment of her kindness to me; it was too much like a professional kindness or, at least, a general one; I wanted intimacy at least. But when I told her of last night's meeting she quivered to attention. She had had a note from Bill, it appeared, and he must have written it after he left me. He had told her, she said, that he was going away again—where, he wasn't sure. He was waiting for clearness or he was running away. As to Jessie, it seemed that she was in an impracticable state of mind and her proposals involved nothing short of death and destruction; she was just a very miserable woman talking rashly. Her mother knew and this had brought her misery to a head. For Mrs. Bland was one of those who, when her Sunday-school days ended in marriage, had received a clock with an inscription recording

her virtuous career, and, though in these later days the custom of presenting clocks to maidens had lapsed, the tradition of the symbol persisted. Her mind ran a great deal on the clock which, from an unregarded item of furniture—for it was stopped and in the unused parlour—had become again a monument of significance. Mrs. Bland went into the room from time to time to contemplate it and these visits, with their obvious intention, were maddening to poor Jessie. Mrs. Bland had taken Rose into the room, ostensibly for private conversation, but the clock provided the text and Jessie had protested angrily. "Let's all talk together," Rose had said but Mrs. Bland naturally wished for the private confabulation. It had led nowhither; it had been wearisome and distressing.

Rose told him everything quickly but with touches of bitterness and sometimes a touch of humour. Mrs. Bland had not been quite unkind but the spoiling of the record hurt her; she looked at her daughter's sin in terms of the clock. The point was, however, that, though there was no clock, a kind of moral repair was possible; an honest woman may be reconstructed even though she lack the crowning glory. I am putting my own colour on it but all this was implicit in Rose's narrative; certainly she had humour. Yet she took all these things hard,

she seemed to accept some kind of responsibility for them. I think she longed for the simple issue of right or wrong that may be settled, in cases of doubt, by prayer (another way is to spin a coin) and in this case were all manner of doubts and qualifications; I have no doubt that her prayers were unceasing but they could not make the crooked straight. She was too honest to be simple and too generous to be easy. Of course all this was none of her business, as the saying is, and if her ways had not been beautiful she would have been a busybody. She took things on. She had taken little things on such as the Blundell family—not so little, perhaps, for they seemed to require a great deal of her assistance—and now this big thing came her way and could not be avoided.

I had been curiously calm; I had let the greatest thing wait; I had halted at the entrance to new life. But she turned her fair, clouded face to look at me enquiringly — it was about some little matter or other—and my passion surged imperatively. Her spirit was immense, but she looked so sorry and subdued and doubtful; for a moment I could not command my voice; I was very close to tears. I had not replied to her question for my mind had travelled beyond it and she looked at me again—a little, personal, hesitating perusal. Even then I did not reply. We had turned out of the village,

passed the church, and the field-path lay before us. I walked by her side as I spoke. I said, "I must tell you—I must tell you—how much I love—love you." I stammered over it like that. She cried, "Oh, not now! I can't—I can't." She wavered and I would have taken her arm; gently, she evaded this. "Yes, now," I said. She shook her averted head a little. "You don't know," I said, "how —how touching you are—how you appeal to me." She said gently, "I am not to be pitied"; gently, and yet with pride. "It isn't pity," I said, "or partly, perhaps. Mustn't we pity one another? Don't you pity me? This — this sorrow makes you beautiful." "Would you have me always sorrowful?" she said.

And then I laughed, leaping upwards to another plane. "Ah! But you're beautiful with the sun shining too. And it shall shine on you. This trouble is only a moment; it will soon be gone." "Our life is only a moment," she said.

This struck coldly on me; it was not just a platitude to her; it was a withdrawal or at least a hint of it. Such are the consolations of religion. I speak bitterly for I have cause. This religion says to the lover: Your love is a breath, a wisp; to the poet: Your songs are not worth while, but a tolerable hymn is part of the eternal. Rose was recalled to her austerities by a phrase and when

I fought against it she brought her sympathies in reinforcement. For she could not bear happiness while the others suffered; she could not think of herself now. Pathetically she put it on the moderate ground of decency. "How could you, now?" she said; it was not even "How could we?" I may have had the better of the argument for it dwindled to that though it was all on my side.

I thought she took the affair of Jessie Bland too tragically though I wasn't making light of it myself. I had cooled to the point of appreciating analogy and wanted to talk about Beatrice and Benedick as throwing some light on our own situation—"I do love nothing in the world so well as you: is not that strange?"—but nothing so simple as "Kill Claudio" could relieve us. There was no question of killing Bill who—I quoted again —"is of the faction that is wronged; his madness is poor Hamlet's enemy." She listened to me disapprovingly, I thought, and, indeed, I felt that I was becoming literary and trivial; you can hardly fit pieces of art into your own emotions.

Her analogies came from another source and they were too tremendous. When her friends suffered her mind ran on the agony in the Garden or death on the Cross. I could not follow into her fastnesses and I told myself with vexation that her refuge was a torture chamber. Such wisdom and

moderation and truthfulness as I had were powerless before this obsession. It was a passion, perhaps; but to me it was a passion for withdrawal, it was negation labelled mystery. With anyone else I might have scorned the mystery as a flimsy affair made up of legends and misapprehensions; now it was exalted by my own imaginings of her.

We couldn't get back to hard prose and common sense and the question what to do. We were, after all, spectators and we couldn't control the game. Bill was away, Harper implacable and Jessie wild and hopeless. The secret could not be kept much longer if it was not already out. And, indeed, the revelation might somehow simplify matters; the outcry and gossip would be a nuisance, in themselves trumpery but perhaps tending to some positive result. This was in my mind when Lydden came into sight. He was taking his quiet evening walk about the fields and looked the part of the beneficent clergyman. He greeted us with the right degree of cordiality and yet with discretion; of course he stopped to speak to us. He said nothing in particular but he gave you a sort of spurious confidence; you felt that the world would never get the better of that manner. His parson's hat had a touch and a tilt that suited the landscape, his stick was evidently the right kind of stick. Discretions abounded in his small-talk and even if

murder should out there could hardly be any question of blood while he was there. When he left us I think Rose was more unhappy than she had been. I know that I had gained nothing but the impression of a sham safety, an abominable peace.

And then, like a thunderclap, came the news of Bill's accident. I had heard from him that he had gone to Wasdale; some men he knew were going there to climb and I think he had volunteered to join them. "You'll think it queer," he said in his note, "for me to come up here again, but the place draws me; when I heard them talking of it I felt that I must go. I wanted to get away." He said little besides and the next I heard of him was in Fry's telegram. This said: "Campion badly hurt. Wants you. Do you know where his people are? He will not say." A train was named and a car was to meet me at Seascale. I caught the afternoon train, first arranging to send out the telegram to Rose at Darley with a promise to wire as soon as I arrived.

I don't want to recall that detestable journey, maddeningly slow in its later stages as we crawled and doubled about the coast. One can't think of undefined calamity and I came back, again and again, to the mere words of the telegram and their aspect on the paper. I could not think of Bill nor

picture him; I held a great flood of emotion in reserve; I did think, though, of Rose and Jessie. My mind went on to Reuben Harper and that dark sister of his and I fancied them receiving this news without words and yet with some sort of gloomy common understanding. They must be touched by it, they must be moved, and I could have cried out to them: "You see! He's hurt now, he's down now — nay, he's dead. We are all in the same boat." It did seem monstrous now to have hard thoughts of any fellow-creature. And here was I, with hard thoughts of these Harpers and perhaps they might be the next. Bill vulnerable, Bill dying, was incredible.

Fry met me at Seascale and we were in the car immediately. A man with golf clubs, whom I knew casually, signalled to me, but, under my breath, I told Fry to drive on and escape his enquiries. Evening was closing in; the slack, holiday look of the place jarred on me; I suppose that anything would have jarred. To my first question Fry had said: "Living? Yes. Very bad. Spine's damaged. Doctors don't speak positively yet. Afraid it's all up." He spoke like a telegram and I was wondering how many words it came to. They had had a local doctor—local there had a generous significance—and another doctor had come from Lancaster and was now with Bill; Fry was to

drive him down to the last train. He had declined to give an immediate opinion and with the verdict unpronounced I had a glimpse of hopefulness; I became nervously excited. Naturally, Bill didn't speak much, but, as Fry said, he kept his form. The unaccountable thing was that he wouldn't give the address of his people. And then Fry checked the car. "You'll know, perhaps," he said. "We might wire from here." I wasn't very clear about it and, anyhow, I wanted to hear what Bill said before doing anything. We went on.

Fry began at once with an explanation of the accident which, with ramifications and repetitions, lasted till we reached Wasdale Head. They had been doubtful about admitting Bill to their party but he was a man difficult to refuse; as Fry said, "He came whether or not and, of course, we liked to have him." They wanted him just to hang about and then entertain them in the evening, but Bill insisted on joining the climbs, which had to be pretty easy in consequence. But they had come to do Somebody's Gully or Chimney in particular and Bill was told plainly that he would have to stand down for that. He agreed and they left him at the foot of the climb with a cigar and a seven-penny novel. And then, when they were in the thick of it, they were amazed and chagrined to find Bill following. It was too bad; poor Fry,

with tears in his voice, gave some reflection of the vexed, indignant attitude of the party. There they were, roped for a difficult undertaking, and up comes this crass novice risking his life and making them ridiculous; positively, he was still smoking his cigar. Bill, at his best, wouldn't have done it but he was out for excitement and reckless. His first words after the accident had been gasping apologies for his bad manners.

Fry gave the details of the affair with some zest, as these climbers do; he began with a short history of attempts on the gully and then he told me their order on the rope and how they were placed when Bill appeared. The foolish fellow stood grinning at them and waving his cigar and they all cursed him together. He fell from his ledge as if they had swept him off with a volley. "It was most extraordinary," said Fry; "the words might have knocked him over." He was troubled about it and wanted to be reassured. Ought they to have been gentle with him? He was not in what a climber would call a dangerous place. It was most annoying. The trivial resentment kept surging up through Fry's real commiseration. The car went at a good pace and he had to speak with emphasis to make me hear; his communication lacked intimacy. That Bill should have fallen then and there while they yelled at him was so distressing.

I could imagine their voices trailing off in consternation. Fry, as he told me afterwards, had a small, peculiar source of regret. He had shouted "bloody fool"—an expression which he never used; if it had been "damned fool" he would not have been so miserable.

It took them some time to get down to Bill for they were all shaky and they might have had another accident. Fry wanted to describe this descent but I wouldn't let him. Bill was more or less unconscious and had some ugly bruises; they "straightened him out a little" and were hopeful that there were no fatal breakages. Fry sat with him while the other two went for help, as some sort of litter was necessary. It became obvious that he was badly hurt.

They were away "a deuce of a time" and Bill talked a little. My name came up several times so Fry wired to me as soon as he could. A good deal was unintelligible and, as Fry said with a glance at me, he said some queer things. Later in the day he had had a clear interval and made it plain that any unconscious drivel should be considered in confidence. To suggestions of sending for some of his "people" he had mentioned me again and expressed satisfaction when he heard that I had been sent for. This was after they got him down

—a hellish job Fry called it; he wouldn't talk of that, he shook a gloomy head. "It's only a few hours ago," he said.

We rushed along by the dark lake till the mountains seemed to close upon us. Fry was silent now and we were both in the grip of the near future; the time was heavy with apprehensions. In a gaunt dining-room, chosen, no doubt, for privacy, we found the Lancaster doctor talking to Mulholland and Perrin. Dr. Wren was illustrating something with a rough diagram on the back of a menu card. He welcomed an addition to his audience and made his points very clear. He was a calm, intellectual-looking man with a manner expressive of polite regret. He was ready to mitigate our sorrow with interest in the case. Perceiving a disposition to stray beyond it, I put some blunt questions and received clear but qualified replies. Dr. Wren was admirable in his delimitations. I think he found it a relief to talk plainly to men about a case—and men who, as he understood, were not closely related to the patient; he was a man intellectually clear and had so often been compelled to put a gloss on things. What I gathered was that Bill was suffering from general shock, which should presently subside, and from a particular and dangerous, though doubtful, injury to the spine. As Dr.

Wren said, with some enjoyment of the epigram, "It's all in his favour that he's not a dead man now." He could not stay all night and promised to return next day. The local man would be there too and they would hold what Dr. Wren politely called a consultation. He hoped then to speak more definitely. I asked if I might see Bill and he knitted his brows. "Not unless he insists on it," he said. Then, very frankly, he added, "What is your relation to him? Intimate friend?" I assented and he said, "I understand then, Mr. Fenn, that you have some responsibility here. Mr. Campion's relatives——" He looked at me inquiringly. Fry and the others, so to speak, joined in the look as though to say, "This is your business. We're out of this." I didn't know much of Bill's people. He had a father and mother somewhere about London and one or two brothers abroad. I undertook to get the parents' address from him if possible and to communicate with them. A nurse, appearing at the door, looked at the doctor, who went out and returned almost immediately. "He wants you," he said, "and you'd better go up. Get that address now. We'll send a wire at once."

But this matter of the address went out of my head when I saw Bill. He was flat and bandaged and seemed almost one with the linen about him.

It was strange to see his overpowering vitality sunken to this; I had never seen his face pale before. I just looked at him and he looked back at me. I hadn't words for it and he understood that well enough. I saw his lips move and bent to hear, but could not distinguish anything. Then his face seemed to twitch a little and I perceived that he was trying to wink. There lay old Bill, fearless and calm, and I was exalted for a moment to think that I should go on admiring him to the end. Not entirely calm though, for presently I caught his murmuring: "Not so bad as that—lost voice—your coming." I sat down by the bed trying to smile; it became a horrible, spasmodic grin, I'm afraid.

I realised that the nurse was there and she beckoned to me with her eyes. I went to her and she whispered, "Dr. Wren's going and wants that address." I hesitated a moment and then walked to the bed. "Oh, Bill!" I said cheerfully, "Dr. Wren thinks your folk ought to know about this. Where are they? What's the address? I'll put it nicely, not to alarm your mother."

Bill looked at me and his eyes turned to the nurse. His voice came out stronger this time. "Not just yet. I'll talk to you first." We both gazed at him doubtfully. "You'd better tell

Dr. Wren what he says," I suggested, and she went away.

Then Bill began to talk to me and though he wasted few words at first I interrupted him to remonstrate about the tax on his strength. "I know, I know," he said, impatiently. "Just listen to the points. This fellow won't or can't be straight and I hadn't energy to make him speak out." He paused. "I can't go right ahead," he muttered. "I must take it easy." Disjointedly, then, he doled me out his points. "First," he said, "am I dying? Am I close on it?" I said, "No. I don't think so; he can't say yet how bad you are." He thought over this. "Pretty bad," I think," he said, "but I feel like a few days. I can't get well. The point is——" He trailed away and I begged him to let the point wait.

Then he said, "You've just got to get the hang of what I want and do it. Understand? Don't make me say things twice." He spoke with authority and in a man physically low authority is wonderfully spiritual. "Lose no time," he said.

I waited for his instructions and they were slow in coming. "That son of mine"—he said and stopped. He spoke in irregular pulsations, he mumbled and then was clear and strong. I managed to catch "make him legitimate, you

know," and then "only fair to the girl—Jessie—Jessie what's-her-name—baby might be a girl?—not to me—advantage of dying—can have it what I like—By-the-bye, if I don't get through to Darley—don't see her—Jessie—make up something pretty will you—nice message, you know—not in form for it—flowers, kisses, anything you like."

He paused and I said, "That's all right," counselling rest and obedience to doctor and nurse. He said, "Don't be a fool."

He was quiet for a time and his eyes gazed into a world beyond me. They came back with the enquiry, startling from him, "How do I look?" He did not wait for an answer. "Does she know?" he said. I knew whom he meant. "Would it shock her to see me?" And then, in a lamentable tone, "Am I less than a man?"

And so this great calamity came home to me. A dying man is less than a man and I could not look on Bill and hope that he would live. He was stricken. He was no longer a rival of mine. Yes, I thought that. It brought no joy, no confidence. I could have made the romantic sacrifice to him then. Rose was not mine to give but I could have yielded something, I could have made some great vague sacrifice; these emotions do not define themselves. Here was Bill losing the world, losing everything, as we must all lose, and it was intoler-

able. All our religions and philosophies are straws in the fire of revolt against this. We remain calm, we observe the proprieties and it is better so; a man protesting honestly like a child would be terrible.

I stood gazing at Bill. I wanted to say, "You're not so bad, old chap," or "You look a bit pale, but otherwise"—something of that kind. I couldn't do it. I couldn't dishonour Bill by that sort of nonsense. There is something cruel and implacable in me, I think, though one may give it the pretty name of idealism. Besides, I craved for myself the exaltation that would lift me above the death-bed. Bill had asked me that question: "Am I less than a man?" I said, "Man is a spirit."

He looked at me steadily and gallantly. I had invited him to renounce all that he craved and, after all, it was only taking him at his word. Like a sententious parson I offered him ghostly consolation. Rose was not for him now or only some faint, impalpable exhalation of her. He knew it but he was a brave, concrete fellow; he might acknowledge defeat but he would not yield. I bent to hear his murmurings. They were a string of curses.

And then Bill became practical again in a desultory way. He wanted to get to Darley and be married; the alternative was that Jessie should

come to Wasdale but it was in his mind that Rose was at Darley; she could come to Wasdale but she might not stay. I think this marriage appeared to him as a finality and that he had no thought of permitting Jessie to take him in hand. He returned several times to the idea of legitimising his son. I think he looked forward to this wedding as a condemned man does to the incident supervening; it was a sort of protection. He even had a half-humorous conception of it as a big scene. "Melodrama's the thing," he said; "let's be big and simple, anyhow. Mighty power sweeping me on? Not at all. Everything's damned faint. But I must have something." He agreed to postpone discussion till the doctor had been seen again. And then I introduced the question of his father and mother and asked him where to wire to. He was distressed. "You mustn't," he said; "they'd try to stop me. It would be infernal." "But—" I began. "I know it's awkward for you," he said. "I shan't have many more favours to ask." He closed his eyes. As I stood looking at him the nurse returned. She shook her head at me in reproach and I left him.

A telegram from Rose was handed to me. She asked whether she should come, wanted news. I replied, I remember, almost hopefully; it was only an attitude. Sitting down with the others to

the table d'hôte dinner I was informed that the wire would not get through that night but would be despatched early in the morning. We were all under the cloud but Fry and the others were invested with a gloomy importance; I shared in the deferential sympathy. Some of the tourists, I think, were conscious of receiving full measure in a visit to Wasdale with a climbing accident thrown in; I was minded to suggest that some small addition to their bills would be reasonable. The talk was subdued and it halted whenever either of the four of us began to speak. To my annoyance Perrin was drawn by a young lady who sat beside him. She pushed enquiries gently and he was not reluctant to answer, though I think he was conscious of my eye on him. Everybody listened, several commented and questioned and we seemed to be entering upon a general chat about the affair. A bland person—I think he was the young lady's father—said something to Mulholland about "Your friend's unfortunate rashness." Now Mulholland was a climber with a good deal of professional pride and, blameless though he was, the irregularity of this episode was very distressing to him. He did not object to accidents, but he always wanted the climbers to be dismissed without a stain on their characters. I believe he had objected to Bill joining the party

at all, but he had accepted him at last with some solemnity and now the loyal fellow could not just disclaim him. He was a man of few words and gruff and the bland gentleman worried him. We were startled to hear, "Oh, shut up!" I caught Perrin's look of excessive discomfort and I think my heartless, needless laugh startled the company even more than Mulholland had done.

Presently some other climbing men were coolly discussing their next day's plans. One of them, it seems, had proposed a fell walk "for a change," but I think the others felt it to be a point of honour not to falter on account of an unfortunate irrelevance. Poor Bill's escapade was no more to them than a house-painter falling off a ladder—less, for the painter is an expert in balance and nerve. The subject of fell walks was discussed languidly and in its aspect of beating the day's record in peaks it held the table for a time; some famous accomplishments were recalled. After dinner I was faintly amused to see Perrin cornered by the young lady; seeing me his expression hovered between apology and defiance.

I had a glimpse of Bill next morning, but his eyes were closed and I tiptoed out. The nurse's report was colourless. Dr. Wren could not arrive till afternoon and time encompassed us heavily. Fry offered to take me to the scene of the accident

but I would not. I knew the manner of his demonstrations—a foot here, a hand there and, if he could have had it, a bag of shavings to illustrate the fall. I did not want a vision of the place and the mechanics of the thing didn't matter. Fry was disappointed. He asked me whether I was dissatisfied, whether I considered them to blame. With all the cordiality I could muster I reassured him. We mooned about. Presently I started up the Sty Head aimlessly. I plodded on into the mist and rain. I began to walk as if with a purpose and perhaps I knew my destination then. Of course I turned up the Esk Hause Pass, of course I halted at Sprinkling Tarn. The place was as familiar as a room, the signs of occupation were fresh, and yet nothing in the world could be so distant and strange. I tasted vain emotions. The mist hung heavy on Great End; here, below, it drifted unceasingly. Man is a spirit. That's what I'd told him. We are at the mercy of words, of pronouncements; dignity, sententiousness, the tricks of evasion. I didn't want to think, I wanted to be buoyed up by vague, rhetorical interpretations of nature. Fancies, fancies, whirling vapours. I whispered:

"To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world."

Bill was concrete enough yet, but here you could think anything, believe anything. Stuff yourself full of creeds and sanities and come out to the mists of Esk Hause when your friend lies dying; all is smoke in the wind. I wanted Rose; I wanted to ask her whether here, now, with Bill suffering the inexplicable change, she had yet the image of security. I would have torn veils from her selfishly; I wanted to know what she made of it, what right she had to these formalities of peace, what Christ on the Cross had to do with this. Of all the world she was the one to help me but I would not accept her credentials; only herself.

I was by Dr. Wren that afternoon as he stood with hands clasped behind him, looking down on Bill, and could spare some admiration for the man. There is a doctor's joke, I believe, about the practitioner who gratified a patient's family by exclaiming, "My God! It's a terrible case"; Wren was, perhaps, at the other extreme. He was very much interested and thought it reasonable that we should be interested too. Like Fry he would demonstrate but, unlike Fry, he had no regard for irrelevant details. He was polite almost to the point of kindness but one would have hated to show any emotion before him; certainly he would have received it with extreme consideration. He put a few questions to Bill while I was there and

Bill answered languidly at first, but Wren seemed to interest him; there was an intellectual dominance about the man. As Bill said afterwards, he made you take yourself scientifically. I left him making an examination with the other doctor.

We sat for a long time in gloomy expectation and at last Wren came to us. We were in a room with a derelict billiard table which was close enough to the four walls for sportive climbers to make its circuit, legs ceilingwards, of an evening; Fry was pointing out, with careful illustration, where Bill had failed in his attempt to accomplish this feat, when Wren came in. Wren asked me at once whether Bill's people had been sent for and raised his eyebrows at the lame explanation that I didn't know where they lived. The others were equally ignorant and Wren suggested, rather impatiently, that we must know somebody who knew somebody who knew. "Mr. Campion declines to give me the information," he said, gazing at us interrogatively. Fry asked if their immediate presence was necessary. I think Bill had jarred Dr. Wren for he answered testily, "Necessary? It depends on what you mean. I don't say he's going to die immediately." He gave us the clearest of demonstrations again but they were too impartial to help us to what we wanted to know. And in the presence of the others

not one of us liked to say plainly: "Is Bill going to die?" I wanted to get Wren to myself.

Presently I accomplished this, or perhaps he did, for I think he saw that I should be reticent before the others. He harped on the family. "It's your responsibility, not mine," he said. He hated to have things out of order. I asked him the blunt question about Bill and he began again with his clear demonstrations about the nature of the injury. I said, "I just want to know whether he'll live or die." He looked offended but considered the point. He seemed to recognise it as a detail of some interest prematurely introduced. He would not commit himself but his report gave little hope. The injury to the spine was irreparable, its development not quite certain. It was possible that Bill might live — "for some years." He added cautiously that this was unlikely; there was no cure. Most probably some acute form of paralysis — it might be soon — and so it was necessary to be prepared. "Both father and mother, I understand" — he looked at me admonishingly. He was not a man to interfere in other people's business but he was conscious of certain social obligations on the fringe of his profession; he had the moral sense and liked things to be in order. I introduced the question of removal. It appeared that Bill had

done so too and Wren was thoughtful over this. He forbade it for some days, anyhow. "Presently," — he looked about him — "he can't stay here for ever." Suddenly he said to me, "How would you propose to remove him?" I was explaining a project for cutting out the inside of a motor-car so as to make room for a sort of bed when he interrupted with "Have you ever heard of an ambulance?" It was more thoughtful than sarcastic and he took no pleasure in my collapse. "We'll talk about it presently," he said. "In the meantime"—I lost his remark for I was startled by voices outside. I think he was saying that he would be pleased to have my attention when Rose and Gertie walked in.

They hardly greeted me; the enquiry was in their eyes before they spoke. I was confused and excited but I knew that they wanted the essential word. "He may live," I said. They stared at me like one and it was Gertie who said "Get well?" Despairingly I shook my head. I turned to Wren.

He was boggling over the question of introductions. I think he was impressed by Rose and Gertie, for if they were wrong the world was wrong, but he wanted to know who they were. Was he at last to be relieved of the social responsibility? Were these Bill's people? Politely he said "Miss

Campion?" and looked from one to the other. Rose shook her head and I said their names. She said: "We are friends of Mr. Campion," and the poor man was sadly puzzled. "Taking a holiday?" he suggested. I believe it had occurred to him that one or other of them was engaged to Bill and that it would be delicate to give them the chance of putting it that they had happened to come to Wasdale. Duty reasserted itself with: "Perhaps you know the address of Mr. Campion's people?" He looked at me rather threateningly and Rose enquiringly. To my halting explanation she said, "His mother must be told."

Wren looked at me triumphantly but was calm again when Rose said, "He can't get well, then?" She had seen it in our faces, our attitudes. Wren gave a few words of explanation and they both listened with an awful concentration; Gertie turned away. Before they went out together Rose said to me, "It would be fair to Dr. Wren to tell him the whole circumstances."

She was wiser than I and perceived enough of Wren's character to know the best way to treat him. Besides, she was naturally for the plain word and a simple faith in reason and truth. We were coming to the time when nothing could be hidden. I think Wren was very much gratified by the confidence implied and I felt rather like an

unwilling witness chidden by the judge. My task was exceedingly difficult for Wren proved confoundedly interested in shades; he was not subtle but he was remarkably precise. It was with dim remembrances of melodrama that I began by saying that Bill had something on his mind; I dwelt on the point that it would be very much in his favour to get it off his mind. Wren listened with critical gravity while I put the case as succinctly as I could. He found it interesting for he had a scientific mind and, it seemed, a curious zest for the incredible or disastrous in social affairs; it helped him to the enjoyment of his own scrupulous correctness. I could see that he was impressed by the idea of Bill wishing to legitimise his son, for a little bit of order in disorder appealed to him too. As we talked, Rose put her head in at the door and asked permission to see Bill. Wren appeared to be shocked, but when she said that it was to obtain Mrs. Campion's address he agreed. He counselled brevity. When I told him, in answer to his enquiry, that I thought Mr. and Mrs. Campion had not what he called "the pleasure of Miss Avory's acquaintance," he became a degree more chilly. However, he handsomely acknowledged that Miss Avory and Miss Blundell were ladies of an undoubted—he hesitated for a better word—"respectability."

Later in the day I went out with Gertie for an aimless walk. A telegram composed by Rose and signed by Wren had been despatched to Mr. Campion, and we heard presently that he and his wife could not get through that night but would sleep at Preston and come on next day. Rose was "lying down"; the interview with Bill had shaken her. I did not get a detailed account of it from Gertie but hints that helped me to its reconstruction. Bill had been unwilling and at the same time had tried to defend his mother from the implication in his unwillingness. His "I know them and you don't" had been swept aside by Rose, who stood for big fundamental things. Poor Bill had pleaded in vain and there was something terrifying in the idea of the girl standing over him exhortingly. He asked for little more than to die in peace and found a hard taskmaster. And Rose had come away pale and trembling. Gertie, loyal little soul, insisted on that; she said it twice, seeking to justify her friend by this emotion. I re-assured her; I said, "It would hurt her more than him," and Gertie was grateful. It occurred to me that I ought to say something for Bill, but I did not know his mother and the whole thing was complex, so I could not speak with sincerity. And I could not imitate Gertie's simple staunchness and humility. I had an impulse of deep liking and

admiration for her. She was one of the Celias, the Nerissas, the outshone. She was a true friend of my friend and, I think, of me. She touched my emotions; I was glad to be out there in the winds and mists with her; I looked at her face and she, too, was mysterious and remote.

The inn, when we got back to it, seemed to have about it an air of Wasdale justifying itself. These climbing accidents give the place something of the importance of tragedy. Servants and guests looked at us when we passed them and all trod lightly and spoke in tones a little lower than usual. I saw Bill for a few minutes and he greeted me with a rueful grin. "Had to give in," he said, and then, with a clear sincerity, "I was glad to have something to give her."

"She likes to have her own way," I said, and he replied, "I'm not done yet."

It was almost defiant but it was noble too. I could only suggest that with his father and mother there the "scene" would be bigger than ever. I think he was mildly stimulated by this or at least amused, but he was tired and he had begun to husband his strength.

CHAPTER XII

FATHERS AND CHILDREN

MR. AND MRS. CAMPION were later in arriving than they had expected and I didn't get a very vivid impression of them when I met them in the evening with the motor and drove them to Wasdale. I think it isn't my way to have these vivid impressions, but rather to let the people grow and reveal themselves; perhaps it's a kind of self-mistrust, but to foster a pride in instant penetration never seemed quite fair. Bill's attitude had made me expect something rather rigid, but on the whole they were not so; they were anxious and perturbed, as anyone would be, and the mother listened to my partial re-assurance as a mother would. Campion struck me as too gentlemanlike for Bill's father; he was both big and neat, comely, with well-trimmed beard and moustache, well-gloved and coated; he assumed complete command of himself very soon. His wife had a rather deprecating manner; it was as though she knew that Bill had not given a very handsome account of them. But the impression she made on me was vague and

I was at first conscious of little beyond her robes and veil and scent and that deprecating, anxious manner. They had rather an astonishing amount of luggage and when she saw me eyeing it she said, "We didn't know how long we should be away." I had a mad notion to ask if they had brought wedding garments, but, indeed, these were the kind of people that always would be prepared for anything in the social round. I drove the car, with Mrs. Campion beside me and Campion behind, and I felt again the overwhelming romance of these black mountains; they were looming over the quiet little room which held Bill and they couldn't dwarf his spirit. It occurred to me suddenly that it was necessary to say something about the delay in sending for them. She made it too easy, she ought to have resented my boggling explanation. Bill had given me *carte blanche;* his "You explain" had covered everything. The poor fellow couldn't do it himself for his strength must be reserved for the struggle—if there was to be one. I didn't know whether Mrs. Campion had even heard of Rose, but something must be said of her and Gertie before we arrived. It was really very awkward and yet it was not awkward enough. She swallowed Rose and Gertie without a murmur and I began to wonder whether it was that the motherhood in her cared whether her son lived or

died and for nothing else. I had to discover that she was not so single-minded; she was one of the women who can bide their time.

She was cordial enough with Rose and Gertie, and Campion was gentlemanlike, betraying no curiosity; I suppose his wife gave him some sort of explanation when they were alone. I was like a stage-manager compelled to improvise a big performance and relieved to find that the actors knew more of their parts than I had supposed. The first thing was for the parents to see Bill, and Mrs. Campion insisted on this at once. Only the nurse witnessed the interview and I know nothing about it. I had five minutes' conversation with Campion before dinner and told him what I knew of the accident; subsequently he heard a good deal about it from Fry, with whom he got on very well. Campion put one question to me suddenly; he said, "Is my son engaged to Miss Avory?" I told him he was not. Campion reflected for a moment and said, "She is here by chance?" I repeated something of the explanation I had made to his wife—a sudden impulse of friendship was the gist of it—and he said coldly that it was unusual. Rather tartly I told him we hadn't come to the end of the unusual yet. To his look of interrogation I suggested that explanations had better be deferred until after dinner.

We all sat together at the tail of the long table and talked cautiously about extraneous matters. The Campions cast curious eyes at their environment. I think they had never seen anything like it before; they were bothered by the gentlemanly in rough disguise; you are not expected to wear evening dress in Wasdale. I heard Mrs. Campion ask Rose whether the walks in the neighbourhood were pretty and Rose's discreet reply that they were considered to be very fine. Both Rose and Gertie were charmingly simple, friendly and rather sad. I wondered whether Bill was taking a humorous pleasure in contemplating this queer party, or whether pain or ennui prevailed. I was nervous and uneasy, having the grand explanation on my mind.

It came shortly after dinner. There was some preliminary manœuvring, partly because Campion made an idiotic attempt to bring Fry in. Feeling safer with Fry than with me, he chose to regard him as Bill's particular friend. Of course Fry knew more about the accident than I did and was always anxious to talk about it. To him it was inconceivable that there was anything more important to discuss and, with Campion's encouragement, he couldn't understand why he should be excluded. I'm afraid I shut the door on him with more of emphasis than explanation, but

I couldn't be bothered with him then. The Campions, at my suggestion, had returned to the dining-room after the servants had cleared away. It was the only place for us and the bare inadequacy of it gave the impression of emergency. They knew that something pretty serious was to come, for Bill had referred them to me, but I think they didn't know its nature. It was an awkward job, but after all, as I reflected, Bill's hurt was far bigger than anything else could be and nothing that I could say would make that worse. And so I began upon it delicately, tentatively, choosing my words and even preferring euphemisms. The coldness of these creatures oppressed me. They listened with a sort of distaste and such slight comment as they made never touched the centre. With growing resentment I began to realise that they considered me on my defence. I think this did, at least, improve the quality of my diction. I began to give them the facts resolutely, without any attempt to make them palatable. They couldn't be that, of course, but I felt that, like a grim clerk in a law court, I was giving them the skeleton of what might have been fairly expressed in flesh and blood. They made little exclamations and gestures that were maddening, but I wouldn't be maddened. I became as cold as stone. When I referred to Bill's proposed marriage,

Mrs. Campion said, "But he might recover." I did not reply to that and Campion said, "There's another reason against it; he might not recover." This seemed subtle for what I had taken to be a fairly simple creature, but he had the instincts of self-defence; it appeared that he was thinking he might have quite a wrong kind of grandchild on his hands.

Clearly there was to be formidable pressure against Bill's effort to make amends. Mrs. Campion did not waste her strength in emphatic protests. Her "You see, Mr. Fenn, that this marriage is impracticable?" was almost persuasive and she smiled at my laconic "No." Referring to something that I had said she asked, "Then do I understand that Miss Avory is this young woman's representative? Did she come here in that capacity?" I suggested that I was not Miss Avory's representative and that probably she was ready to answer any questions. And, really, it seemed to me that if Rose was to be explained she must do it herself; I could not give her in terms of facts. With some small show of geniality I suggested that she should be brought in—I did not wish to make things more difficult for her than they must be—and though I think they considered the suggestion indelicate they agreed. Rose was at least an interesting pheno-

menon. I cannot write with much sympathy of these people and it has always been a mystery to me how they could have produced Bill between them, but, of course, their anxieties about their son must take colour from their own habits and prepossessions. Perhaps it was natural, too, that they should regard Bill's friends with some suspicion; he had got into a mess and, anyhow, they hadn't prevented him. These parents were not generous, but it was hard upon them to find this ugly complication grafted upon a calamity that they might have taken with dignity.

So I went to look for Rose, found her with Gertie and told her, as plainly as I could, what she was wanted for. Gertie grasped her hand almost as though she would have detained her and I think the gallant little girl would have come, too, at a hint, to succour or sustain. That seemed impossible and I parted them, trying to relieve the situation by some playful words; I meant well, but "You're out of the fun"—I think it was something like that—jarred upon me when I turned and saw Gertie's face of intense commiseration. For what? It was no great ordeal, perhaps, but all now was grave and difficult.

Rose was beautifully friendly to them and to Bill. Her friendship for Bill, so frankly avowed, was the most natural thing in the world to me now; to

them it seemed to be a cover for something else. I don't think they ever lost the idea that she had a passion for Bill and they were puzzled at her position as an advocate of this marriage. I think Mrs. Campion finally put it down to religion, but from a conversation I had with Campion a few days afterwards it appeared that he had suspected the most melodramatic motives. "You never know what a jealous woman will do," was one of his profound generalisations, and I learned that his suspicions pointed to some kind of obscure revenge; Bill was to be saddled with an impossible wife if he recovered—some such rubbish. He was curiously foolish and put some extraordinary questions to Rose. He asked about her political opinions and positively enquired her age. His wife suffered him, though perhaps not very gladly, for she was distinctly the better quality of the two. Of course the conference was indeterminate, such *pourparlers* could not take us far. Naturally they were very curious, but it appeared to be beneath their dignity to ask searching questions though these broke through the chilly surface from time to time. One felt sorry for them for it was trying to have such a big thing presented with all the exasperating circumstance. I think that Campion hated any break in his gentlemanlike manner and most resolutely and honourably he recaptured his suavity; his

manner to Rose assumed a preposterous kindness as of a wise man to an interesting child who would know better some day. Mrs. Campion was not so foolish and took command, so to speak, of the acerbities. On some trifling question of procedure she said, sharply enough, "That is for us to decide, not you." One could not but sympathise a little with her for she and her husband were curiously out of it all. It was difficult to imagine what they could make of Rose, who neither fought nor retreated. I perceived that there might be some irritation in her kind of non-resistance; your saint can be sweet and yet uncommonly tough. Campion stalked in with something about being much obliged for our valuable assistance and Bill being now in their hands. I said, "I fancy we're all pretty much in Bill's hands. He'll have his way, whatever it is." This was rather brutal, but the point had to be made. Mrs. Campion shuddered and addressed herself to Rose. "Do you call him Bill?" Rose shook her head, smiling sadly. Then—"But if he wanted it, what could I do?" she said. It appeared that Mrs. Campion preferred Willie.

Later, again, Mrs. Campion said, "It is not for Miss Avory to dispose of my son." No adequate provocation for this had come above the surface and it had almost the dignity of a general principle.

I could have admired the mother for instinctively finding the mark, but I was a little irritated and so betrayed into a crude championship of Rose. I said, "It was Miss Avory who induced him to send for you." It hardly needed Rose's look of reproach to tell me that this was a mistake and I was sorry when Mrs. Campion flushed and stiffened. Rose said, "He is set on a particular course. He was afraid of your influence." It was a sop to the mother's pride and perhaps not a judicious one. We were not doing him much good. I became conscious of subdued laughter from the billiard-room, where somebody was failing at the traverse. Mrs. Campion said she was tired and she looked it. I think she took refuge in her tiredness but Rose and I were intensely sorry for her. The two women went out together and I heard Gertie speak to them in the hall. I had a ludicrous idea that she had been listening at the keyhole. With marked affability Campion offered me a cigar.

Presently I had occasion to go to my room—or, rather, I made it. I knew I might not look in upon Bill then but I wanted, for a moment, to be near him. His room was on the way to mine and at the door his mother stood listening. No. I don't think she was listening; she was just standing there. She did not see me and I turned back.

We had a sort of running fight with the Campions for several days, but they were at a disadvantage. And, indeed, it was very much a sham fight, for Bill was the power now. His will was set and you can't bully a man so grievously sick as he was. The day after the Campions' arrival I saw his mother come down from her second interview with him; I think she had taken care to have Campion out of the way. She was subdued — I could see that—and she was too proud to disguise it. I began to like the woman. "Mr. Fenn," she said, "I don't understand at all. I've never understood Willie and I suppose I'm somehow being punished. I thought that now — he looks like a child again—now—when I heard of this I thought —even when I was terrified—that I should be more to him than I had been all these years. But he's obstinate. It's just as he used to smile at me and be obstinate when he was a child. You can't argue with him now and argument was never any good. I shan't give in. It's all ridiculous. I'll tell you what I want. I want to take him away, as soon as he's ready—to take him away from all of you" —she hesitated—"to take him home."

Rather dreamily, for I was thinking of her, I said, "To the south?" for I had always thought of Bill as coming from the south.

"The south?" she said. "This is the north.

I suppose. I hate this place." She put such vigour into this that I knew Wasdale was receiving an accumulation of various hatreds. Suddenly she said, "Mr. Fenn, you're his friend; be on my side."

Rather wearily I said, "I don't want him to be taken away from me."

She was quite eager and I saw that I had been stupid. "Oh, but you're all right. You shall see as much of him as you like. Come and stay with us. I'm sure you'll see what's best for him."

"You are proposing a treachery that would be quite useless," I said.

She did not reply to this immediately but, as she turned away, she said, "Are you infatuated with that girl, too?" She did not wait for a reply.

These were uncomfortable days while Bill was pulling himself together and we were not permitted to see much of him. The extensive luggage brought by the Campions did not include boots of the sort appropriate to Wasdale and Mrs. Campion could only tread delicately on the milder of the beaten tracks. It was a remarkable sight to see Campion surveying the rows of climbers' boots in the hall on the morning after his arrival. I found him lifting one between finger and thumb and there was more of curiosity than superciliousness in his "What the devil are these?" "Fry's

boots," I said. I did not know that they were Fry's but I fancied this would intrigue him. "Fry's?" he repeated and I could distinctly trace the reflection that Fry was a gentlemanly man. With polite amazement the Campions watched the climbing parties set off. Perhaps there is sometimes a little affectation in their shapeless garments and two ladies started out in costumes that were aggressively rational. Campion, who had exchanged politenesses with them at breakfast and found solace in their gentility, was inclined to turn away as from an indecent spectacle. Mrs. Campion, with an almost colourless maliciousness, said, "Does Miss Avory climb?"

I had a walk with Campion and, sad as the occasion was, I derived some entertainment from his attitude. It recalled that of the poet Gray—was it not Gray?—and the eighteenth century generally; the region was barbarous to him and rather horrible. Fry had been anxious to take him to the place of the accident but Campion had uneasily declined this; then Fry most kindly offered to prepare a sort of *dossier* of narratives, plans and diagrams. This proposal was accepted rather coldly and I think Fry was puzzled and a little hurt because nobody seemed willing to go to the heart of things. As he said, unless this is looked into now there will be no proper record and he was

prepared to furnish a final, exhaustive one. He had photographed the soles of Bill's boots and was off to the scene with a camera and a rope for measurements. To Campion a slip was a slip and there was no need to bother about it; I think his experiences in town boots on the Sty Head paths convinced him of the reality of the climber's dangers. It was heroical of him to go on and I think he believed that he was succeeding where poor Bill had failed. The climbing—there was some distinction, he understood, between what we were doing and climbing—could not be much worse than this for, obviously, a little carelessness must lead to destruction. He insisted on penetrating to Sprinkling Tarn, having heard a word of the camp there. He sacrificed a pair of boots to it and his air of seeing the thing through was highly diverting. He gazed up at Great End with something of the air of stout Cortez finding the Pacific large but very uncomfortable. The district appealed to him particularly as lacking in the common amenities of travel. Incautiously I had said something of a project for making a carriage road over the Sty Head and opposition to this on what he called sentimental considerations appeared to him a kind of wanton insanity. "A man like Fry, now," he said, groping for something decently normal; "would Fry oppose it?" I said

I thought that Fry didn't care a damn how he got to his bit of rock nor where it was. "Would he climb up this?" said Campion, nodding at Great End and I said I believed there was a gully or a chimney or whatever they called it which was scheduled as a climb. The word scheduled seemed to intrigue him a little; it appeared to bring a sort of order into foolhardiness. He said reflectively, "I know a man high up in the Treasury who climbs regularly in Switzerland."

No; I could find nothing of Bill in his father. We descended to Wasdale with what seemed to me unnecessary precaution but the poor man had no nails in his boots or what remained of them. Approaching the inn he assumed a much more confident air and it was faintly amusing to hear his sketchy description to Mrs. Campion of the "excursion to the mountains." He described the scenery as remarkably fine and hinted at the perilous nature of the way. Mrs. Campion appeared to be a polite but disillusioned wife. She, too, was very remote from all I knew of Bill and I reflected that when the child once revolts from his parents he goes far. Yet in her I found physical resemblances or reminders and even turns of thought or speech that threw me back to Bill. It was hardly fair to range these people in my

mind as against their son and she did sometimes disconcert me by a bit of simple motherliness.

The meeting of Campion with Dr. Wren was a gentlemanlike affair. They took to one another at first sight and Campion clung to Wren, saw him go with reluctance and waited with anxiety for his return. It was not entirely on account of Bill though both Campion and his wife appeared to place implicit confidence in the great doctor. For Wren was always to me a great doctor. He was perfectly conscientious and though he desired very much, on social grounds, that Bill should be carried off by his parents he was quite clear in deciding that this was impossible. Bill would not have it and must not be thwarted. Of course all that was gallant and noble in Bill was to Wren phases of his disease, for to him health was always the normal and eccentricity the enemy of mankind. But Campion received the kind of sympathy he wanted. Wren stayed to lunch and after the meal we went into the little smoke-room where Campion became the centre of semi-technical discussions. On the one side Wren plied him with an illuminating sketch of Bill's inside, while on the other Fry advanced such diagrams and memoranda as he had been able to prepare. Campion maintained a fine air of intellectual detachment.

I grew tired of it and went out. Mrs. Campion

was pacing up and down before the inn and I softened to her when I saw her glance upwards; Bill's room was there. I joined her and hardened again when she began to talk about Rose. She wanted to know all about her and I knew so little of her circumstances that she suspected me, I think, of more reticence than I intended. And then it appeared that she was meditating upon the idea of a possible compromise — she seemed to regard it as a compromise. This marriage with Jessie would be preposterous and abominable; it must be avoided at any cost. But the poor woman had divined something of what was at Bill's heart and though she disliked Miss Avory —"extremely" she said with frank defiance—a marriage with her would be more tolerable. She was conceiving the thing in its relation to herself. She was ready for a reasonable amount of suffering if it would contribute to Bill's happiness—"to his peace," she corrected—but the alternative would be an outrage to her and misery to Bill. She had all the values muddled. I didn't even know whether she was thinking of a death-bed marriage to Rose or only an eventuality on recovery. I was not sure that she knew herself, and it was, ridiculously, as though Bill was to be placated with some sort of marriage. I think that in her heart she knew that he was too strong for any of us;

nay, I believe that in her mother's heart she knew that she must yield to his desires. What were they? Could we not save him from this barren sacrifice?

In such circumstances any human being must be subtle and I could not follow all the turns of her mind. I said, without emphasis, that I thought she must not assume that Miss Avory would have been ready to marry Bill in any case. She stiffened at that and said, "Why is she here?" It was no use to advance the plea of ordinary friendship and I was not so disingenuous as to make a point of it that Gertie was here too. The whole thing seemed inexplicable or, at any rate, I felt it impossible that my explanation should go deep enough. I was sorry for her and, glancing at her face, I became dreadfully sorry; for the moment, experimentally, I went over to her side so far as to consider what could be done for her. "Did he ever speak to you of me?" she said.

I really couldn't remember that he had. Resentment was in her tone and anguish beneath it. The poor soul was wronged. Why hadn't Bill spoken of her? He seemed to have dismissed his family quite airily. His father mattered nothing but there was a mother; narrow, jealous, exacting, demanding always that he should conform to her petty standards, but yet a mother. I had never

known one and a wave of sentiment welled up strongly in me; feelings stifled and remote came to the surface. I could have tried to comfort her and, pacing before the inn, I had a silly fear that I might do something foolishly emotional. From time to time she glanced at the window and I thought of Bill, lying up there, with revulsion against him. He was an abominably selfish fellow. I recalled with distaste his over-gallant, slightly burlesque manners towards women. He could neglect and he could betray. I was miserable and an instinct for relief made me think of Bill with Rose. That was different; that uplifted him. Later, I remembered with annoyance and compunction that I might have lied to Mrs. Campion. I might have concocted a suitable attitude for Bill or at least have given him credit for some feeling. When you are not accustomed to lie it is difficult to remember to do it when it should be done. But, after all, was this a case for debasing the currency?

Dr. Wren's car was waiting before the inn and presently he came out with Campion, Fry hovering in the background with a slightly neglected air. The conversation seemed to be absorbing and important; it was, I learnt, about investments. They were agreeing very well and one or other kindled at a tale of 12½ per cent. Mrs. Campion

wanted to speak to Wren and he withdrew with some reluctance from these weighty and yet alluring matters. She took him apart and they walked a few yards along the road together while we watched them. They turned and as they came near it appeared that the short conversation was over; she walked a little in front of him, increased the distance and passed rapidly into the inn without looking at us. Wren got into the car and departed with grave nods.

Campion bored us all with repetitions of approval of Wren. He considered him to be quite up to the standard of Harley Street and in manner unexceptionable. I don't think I felt the comedy of Campion much at the time, though it soon shaped itself for me and presently became one of my not very precious possessions. I have felt sometimes on occasions of stress that we are all very much alike, but one inclines to make a few exceptions; Campion seemed to feel everything on his skin. Rose's lips were compressed when I mentioned him. I think her eyes twinkled; if her charity gave out she had reserves of fun. We were comrades together. I couldn't make love to her under Bill's window; in the house it was difficult to talk to her because she seemed always to be listening for a distant sound. She wouldn't go for a walk with me and I believe that, if she had, our loyalty

to Bill would have kept us from the great subject. I'm not a greedy lover but I'll swear I'm not a cold one. She couldn't know how it touched my imagination to see her poised so serenely among us all, feeling all things deeply as she did and burdened with many anxieties.

It was arranged at last that Rose and Gertie should go on to Darley with power to transform Bill's rooms into a sort of hospital. The Campions had no initiative and Mrs. Campion, defeated in the first engagement, did not attempt mere harassments. The Campions went by train to Darley, rooms having been taken for them at the Bull. Bill, the nurse and I had a careful, anxious journey in the ambulance car. At Lancaster the good Wren inspected us and passed us on. I parted from him with respect and the humility that sometimes overtakes one beside a man who is thorough in his work.

CHAPTER XIII

VAIN INTRIGUES

Bill was exhausted by the journey and for some days I was kept away by the doctors and nurses. Rose now definitely installed herself as one of the nurses, with Gertie as aide-de-camp, and to the astonishment of Darley, and particularly, I imagine, of the Blundells, the two girls took a lodging in the village so that they might conveniently pursue this work. Fortunately, Bill's rooms were the most comfortable in the place, the professional nurse had a talent for minding her own business and Bill had found the way, through a barrier of gentility, to his landlady's heart. And Brady, our young Irish doctor, was no fool. I don't quite know how matters were adjusted in the sick-room but I think Bill made it plain that he meant to die out of hand unless he could have his own way. He wanted Rose's company; this was the biggest thing in the world and, as we knew, he was a man who did not fear to take what he wanted. Brady accepted the position and I have wondered sometimes how he explained it all to his

precise young wife. Perhaps he didn't explain it, though Mrs. Brady must have been more than human if she never tried to get at such a mystery. For Darley had a fearful interest in the affair; it reeked of protest and surmise; there had never been anything so scandalously interesting as this. The murder was out and it was even known that a marriage had been arranged and would shortly take place between Bill and Jessie. Then where did Rose come in?

I believe that Brady saw the thing in its human aspects, but, of course, he had the advantage of being behind the scenes. Indeed, he became one of us and he endangered his popularity because he was rough with those who tried to pump him. He was the kind of fine fellow who, in a lower social stratum, might kick a nagging wife and though he certainly did not kick Mrs. Brady she sometimes had the air of a saint who is recovering from a stoning. He took it as the simplest thing in the world that Rose should become the second nurse and I believe he was very tactful in covering up her deficiencies. Rose and he were great friends and I rejoiced at it. She came and went even when she was not on duty, and the professional nurse's friendly discretion made the way smooth.

It was inevitable that I, too, should sometimes ask myself where Rose came in?—what was the

quality of her friendship for Bill? The simplest of us is not simple but I think that she saw what he wanted and was determined that he should have it; he had not long to live. But why, if her religion told her that this life was only the preparation for another, did she make so much of the consolation for this poor residue? Why did she not preach to him, stimulate, prepare? I am sure she did nothing of the kind and perhaps her strong common sense told her that it was useless; after all, Bill was very tough. Rose's religion seemed to be a secret possession. She would spend herself on others, she was infinitely charitable, but she had no gospel to deliver, the revelation had come to her alone. It was to appear later that Bill had become strangely related to her great preoccupation, but at this time there was no sign of this. I saw her daily and we were tenderly intimate and friendly without word, perhaps almost without thought, of love. I had resigned her for the time and to have the time shortened must mean the end of Bill. I was humbled but I think I was not jealous. In a man sick to death sex is hardly more than a faint, sweet remembrance; passion becomes the fixed idea. Rose and Bill were strange when I thought of them, even when I saw them, together. I thought of him sometimes as grasping for lost

ideals. I don't know; I mustn't sentimentalise him; there is much that he never revealed to me.

A first step had been taken to regularise a position hopelessly irregular by bringing Jessie to see Bill. I think it was only a formal visit, for he was too ill then for either emotions or arrangements and I don't know what the poor girl made of it. The possibility of expediting the marriage was discussed between Rose, Gertie and me with Brady assisting, but though Bill had mentioned it he had declined into a temporary apathy. His mother, too, had paid him a visit but no word could be spoken between them. I think the Campions had for a day the miserable consciousness that the danger of this marriage was past and the faint dawn of a draggled hope, but Bill rallied and brought back their harassments. They fought a losing battle, for it was impossible to put pressure on Bill, whether he was well or ill, and they hadn't a fair chance. Mrs. Campion was not easily routed, though, and for a time the relations between us were strained; my position was inexplicable to her and she still thought that I might have helped. They went to lay their troubles before the clergyman of the parish and, though, in the circumstances, this seemed a desperate expedient they were grasping at some sort of comfort. I think they had heard of the Lyddens as nice people who

would sympathise with the right side. For the Campions had made acquaintances with almost startling rapidity. No doubt they wished to know the lie of the land and everybody was anxious for news and ready to extend sympathy. Obviously they were the right sort for they could talk of the right things. Mrs. Campion's clothes were expensive and in good taste and Campion was invariably gentlemanlike. I think there must have been some exquisite passages between him and Lydden unless, indeed, Mrs. Campion put him in the corner and did not let him speak. I was not privileged to witness these encounters, but Lydden called to see me about them. I made out that they thought there might be some chance of getting at the girl, but I never quite understood how the vicar of the parish could be expected to prevent a marriage which so clearly called for the blessing of the Church. It was a great tribute to Lydden's tact that he should have been considered the man for such a purpose. His call on me had almost the quality of a parochial visit of the friendly kind that is paid to those not in the fold. Of course he did not grossly give himself away, yet such a visit as this must be rather risky; there was a certain loyalty to his kind in making it. When he talked to me the priest was almost perfectly obscured by the elder, kindly man of the world. Mrs. Campion

had come to him — to them — in great distress. "You had not met her before?" I interjected. Yes, he had met her "at tea somewhere," and they had talked together, vaguely it seemed but sympathetically. So she had come to him and now he came to me. The poor mother was very much distressed—her only son—such a marriage—the social embarrassments. He had come to me as I knew—so he understood—the circumstances and, of course, I had great influence with poor Campion —"young Campion." I suppose I was regarding him rather stonily for he faltered a little and remarked that it was difficult to get the true bearings of a case from an agitated mother. It crossed my mind that here was comedy to be enjoyed by Bill if ever he should be himself again, but I was impatient of this finessing. Brutally enough I said, "The case seems fairly simple. The question is whether the child's to be a bastard." Lydden gazed at me mildly with an air of well-bred martyrdom — of being misunderstood up to that point. He astonished me, though, by saying presently, with the appearance of meditation, "No doubt there is to be a child?" Distinctly there was a note of interrogation. But what a suspicion! Was it intended as excuse or defence for himself, or had Mrs. Campion put him up to it? I said, "But even if there isn't?" We looked at

one another and I was within an inch of giving him a dose of Billingsgate, but I'm glad I didn't. We understood one another sufficiently well and I fancy he knew he was up against something pretty hard. The old intriguer had sounded me and would go back to report.

It is a proof of Mrs. Campion's power that Mrs. Lydden, too, was set in motion. That exquisite old heathen tackled me more directly than her husband had done; after all, she was not the parish priest. She stood stoutly by her kind and pronounced the marriage to be impossible or, at least, a grave mistake. I didn't quarrel with her, though several times she used the expression "People of that class," which has always been to me as a red rag to a bull. She found me stupid and she amused me. I never quite lost my old conception of her, and all the time she was rather nice with me. She tried the trick of claiming me as her own and, indeed, I'm accommodating. I'm malleable till I get enraged. I think she thought that she was getting on pretty well till I laughed. I barked out a short hard laugh that startled her. No; we didn't quarrel but the strain was severe for a moment. An old woman with a skin of parchment cannot flush but I could have believed that her cheeks were pink. And then she subsided and merely, so to say, shook her finger at

me. It was really very nice of her and I don't think she bore malice, or not much. We ended purring.

Bill had rallied, but Brady and the Manchester specialist agreed that he was a beaten man. It appeared that we had better be getting on if we must, and Bill began to take an interest in the matter again. By this time Rose and Gertie and I were anxiously intent on the marriage, and we were conscious that we had to drive a skittish team. Jessie was nervous, irritable, ready to protest. Bill had no desire to see her, but we brought her in sometimes and he became weak and polite. I concocted messages to her and became extremely adroit in this difficult form of lying. I doubt now whether it was wise and I'm not sure that she didn't see through me, for Bill did not always play up to my messages. And it was impossible, of course, to explain away Rose. The wonder was that this jealous, suspicious woman could accept Rose but, on the whole, she did. She had all sorts of minor revolts, but this great acceptance held though I don't say it was never strained. One couldn't cross-examine the morose, brooding woman and shifting emotions obscured her, but I think she was greatly, if intermittently, magnanimous. I suppose that, in one of the many ways, she had been in love with Bill, but she saw

that she could never be to him what Rose was. Now the poor girl was confronted with this pallid, broken figure of a possible husband; all her affections were baffled, all her rules of conduct were disturbed. She had some inner light and I think it was the thought of her child.

Jessie's mother was a nuisance, she wasn't up to the pitch at all, but she came in quite usefully as dragon. Naturally she was set on the match and she took it as a very proper attention when Mrs. Campion came to call on her. I don't know whether Rose had been watching but she managed to intervene. She was present at the interview between the two mothers and though she told me about it demurely she saw the comedy. Mrs. Campion wanted to get rid of her and did not dare to attempt business; I think she wanted to be quite sure that these people could not be bought off. With Rose there she had to fall back on mere politenesses. Mrs. Bland took them graciously but with caution, and when Mrs. Campion said that she would like to see Jessie it appeared that it was impossible; headache, a necessary habit of lying down, an unfortunate shyness, prevented it. The old woman scented danger and took her cue from Rose. There was danger, perhaps; at any rate the Campions believed that their best chance was in some sort of appeal to Jessie's magnanimity.

I don't know how it could have been framed and it never was framed. Mrs. Campion tried again to see her and was repulsed. She wrote and I believe that Mrs. Bland intercepted the letter. She was full of nods and winks and a sort of anxious triumph. Jessie, one can believe, was only too glad to be protected. The time passed, the Campions acquiesced despairingly.

It was on the eve of the day appointed for the marriage that I met Reuben Harper and his sister walking together at twilight in the fields. They stopped when I did and we exchanged a remark or two about the coming night, the likelihood of wind and rain. Then we stood silent for a few moments and parted. They had no share in the impending event but I was conscious of their passionate brooding over it. And it seemed a great waste of these strong, noble, ruthless creatures that they should only watch and endure.

CHAPTER XIV

FRIENDS AND LOVERS

THIS marriage of maimed rites came off in Bill's bedroom on a wild morning of early November. I call it of maimed rites partly, I suppose, because I like these Shakespeare phrases and this one seems appropriate, although the Church did what it could. It was part of the joke that Lydden should officiate, and I believe that Tassell would have come in if we had given him anything like a chance. Just before the ceremony he came to Lydden with some question which he pretended was urgent, about a grave, and then he hung about until Rose gently propelled him into the street. I felt rather sorry for him, as one who was just missing a remarkable experience; he had been in at many marriages and at many deaths, no doubt, but here was something between the two. I saw him look back at the house with a ludicrous wistfulness before he went out of my mind.

We assembled in Bill's sitting-room and talked in subdued voices, waiting for the party to be complete. I became acutely conscious that I had

forgotten to tidy up the room; Bill had one or two queer things about and I have said that his taste in photographs was not conventional. What did it matter? We were dealing with realities now. Or were we? There was something unreal about the proceedings, and yet the people were startlingly human. Jessie and her mother were the last to arrive, and I believe the old woman had arranged it so according to her notions of propriety and bridal custom. At a quiet summons from the nurse we had already passed into the bedroom and there we waited for the bride. Bill's mother kissed him and it struck me that this was not so much motherly as symbolical; it represented our greeting too. She came from the bedside and stood beside Lydden, conversing with him in whispers. There was a pause and then Bill's eye singled out Brady. "What the devil's the doctor here for?" he said; "I thought it was funerals he went to." He winked at me and poor Brady burst into the ghost of a laugh. I looked at Mrs. Campion in commiseration and we frowned Brady down.

We heard the arrival below and Rose went to bring up Jessie and her mother. Jessie glanced quickly and nervously round the company before she looked at Bill and I remember thinking that a sentimentalist would find that dreadfully wrong.

And then she looked at him shrinkingly. She was terribly frightened and yet she was a power there; she knew her own mind. I cannot recall how she was dressed but it was pathetically. Suddenly and strangely she had become to me the most important and interesting person; Rose was only a beneficent spectator, Bill something of a masquerader. Mrs. Bland went up to him in a kind of stealthy bustle to shake hands and Bill did his part quite kindly. Gazing down on him she said, "Eh, dear!" Her dress was resplendent. Looking round for Jessie she jerked her head to indicate that some greeting was called for. Jessie did not respond and I think her mother realised that, in strict etiquette, she might be right.

Mrs. Campion went to Jessie and took her hand. Then she kissed her, and I was not sure whether it was impulsive or determined. I think it was kindly and generously done and I believe we all felt very solemn and exalted. I saw Gertie's eyes fill with tears, and as she turned to hide them Mrs. Lydden took her arm and they stood linked together. I thought Campion looked scared. From time to time I got outside it all and considered the people critically. Certainly Bill was having a great time. I think he must have been affected, in some measure, as we were, but this was his masterpiece and he was able to appreciate it.

His eyes turned from one to another. He wanted everything; presently he would chew the cud but he lived in the present too. The steady persistence of his will had brought us together and yet I saw this as an offering to Rose. What a lover's gift! She was calm, she was beneficent and I wondered what she thought of Bill—not so much how she felt but what she thought.

The nurse poured out a dose and Bill gulped it after toasting the company in dumb show. He choked a little and it startled me to realise that he was nervous, as any bridegroom is. It seemed that doctor and nurse should lead the ceremony here, but Lydden opened his book and we fell into a chance grouping. Lydden had appeared to be slightly ruffled, but he was re-assured by his formulas and this grave reading of momentous words gave him the lead. The surplice was overpowering in the crowded little room. We seemed to have surrendered ourselves to something authoritative, our strivings and hesitations were stilled. It was a relief, and yet it was a relief, too, to know that Lydden would soon doff his surplice and become an affable gentleman. I glanced at Rose and the indolence and cowardice in me brought the yearning for agreement, for rest and help, for some beautiful creed that would do for the mind what a noble chorus does for the feelings.

Yet I rebelled against the inscrutable calm; there is a good form of religious exercises that is like that of the skater, immaculately dressed and top-hatted, accomplishing his ideal of smoothness.

I became more captious. It seemed that Lydden had assumed a kind of benevolence, an air of deserving any credit that was about—I'm not fair to him—and I wondered whether he was conscious of some awful incongruities in the words of the service. Campion, I am sure, felt that the words were not in good taste and I had a foolish sort of sympathy with him. The service became a kind of operation that must be got over as speedily as possible.

And then, for a moment, disaster threatened and the queer, incalculable human spirit got the better of the formulas. Bill's eyes were on Rose now with a persistency that made me a little anxious and Jessie's were on them. She made a sudden, alarming movement as though she would have fled. The way to the door was blocked and so it seemed that action was translated into speech. Audibly, with constrained vehemence, she said: "What is he looking at?" Lydden paused in surprise and we were all confounded. Then Bill saved us like a gentleman. What was it he said? "Come closer, my dear"—something like that, with a little weak gesture of invitation. It was

very pathetic. The fellow was acting nobly, superbly. She couldn't resist: she advanced humbly; after all, he was dying. She looked down on his face and couldn't bear it; she edged away and her appealing look fastened on Rose. I stood beside Rose and at that moment, in Jessie's sight, she took my hand. Ah, these quick wits! It thrilled me, but not as a lover; as a critic, I suppose. It was no tender concession to me. Bill saw it and it was all grand for Bill; he understood.

I missed a great deal, for all sorts of curious little things must have been happening. The interruption of the service was only for a few moments. Mrs. Bland gave Jessie away with what was almost a dramatic gesture, and I recall her lurch against Campion as she retreated, her "Beg pardon, 'm sure," and his subdued affability. At the end of the ceremony came the signatures, which included the signing of a will. I don't know why it affected me more sharply than anything that had passed to see Bill scrawling his name to that. Then we stood about conversing in low tones and wondering how to get away. Bill settled that by saying, "Send them all away, Jessie." She looked round at us with startled eyes, and we filed out after a few cheerful words of farewell. I thought he looked at me quizzically, but he was very careful now.

Downstairs we waited again. It seemed that

there was nowhere to go to, nothing to do but to wait. Then Lydden said good-bye and Campion went off with him. I suppose the rest of us had a vague notion that we might be wanted. Mrs. Bland was silent and had an offended air. I had caught a fragment of conversation between her and Bill's landlady as we descended; the salient parts of it were "Did think there'd be a bit of a spread," and "Not likely." She was affronted and the whole affair had been unsatisfactory. She made no advances to the great ladies and they maintained an affable distance. I was sharp to perceive these little things though at the time they did not matter. Bill's mother was very silent. All this had been humiliating to her, but the point was that Bill was dying; that was the great thing. Campion could keep it at a polite distance, the Lyddens were protected by a professional attitude, more than ever she seemed to me a poor mother losing her son. And the tragedy was that she had already lost him; death would not make the difference it should. I suppose we were all wondering what was going on upstairs and the presence of the nurse with us gave significance to the interview. What could these two have to say to one another? The marriage was an irrelevance. Bill wanted nothing from her and she wanted what he could not give.

I do not know what he said to her, though some-

thing of its effect. Presently Jessie called Rose's name and I felt a mighty commiseration for Mrs. Campion. She started forward at the call and then stood looking at Rose accusingly. I think Rose hesitated, but she went without speaking. We waited again and in five or ten minutes Jessie came down. Rose followed her immediately and nodded to the nurse, who went up with Brady. Jessie's cheeks were burning and she took hold of her mother's arm. Mrs. Bland said, "Aren't you going to stop?" Without bitterness Jessie replied, "It isn't me he wants."

She was a queer compound of magnanimities and resentments; one never knew which would be uppermost; she could not choose a tone and maintain it. Yes; her resentment must have been immense, but it was just less than her magnanimity. She stopped before Mrs. Campion; the two were conscious of something in common. "You're his mother and I'm his wife," she said in a kind of amazement. Rose stood like a statue; I could not even see that she was tense. Jessie turned to look at her and I did not know what to expect. A flood of reproaches would not have surprised me, but she said, "I'm not blaming you. It's a bit more that I can understand." I'm emotional and I found it very affecting. I think I wanted Rose to fall on her neck, I wanted Mrs. Campion and

Jessie to shed tears together. They knew better, they were holding themselves in. Rose said, "Thank you, Jessie," and Jessie, with "Come, mother," took possession of Mrs. Bland and led her away in a state of inarticulate protest. At the door Jessie said, "Good morning, all."

We didn't know what to say to one another, so we said nothing. We were thinning away like the guests at a party as their carriages are announced. Mrs. Campion seemed to be listening for a summons, but Mrs. Lydden, with some word of "this afternoon," led her away. Then Gertie bolted suddenly and Rose and I were alone. She sat down in an armchair, stretched out her limbs and relaxed. It was very friendly and I think it was intended partly for my re-assurance, as though at some tremendous crisis one should say, "Stiffish job, isn't it?" I wanted to love her, but I wanted to support her also and the two did not quite correspond. She was living under a great strain and I feared to weaken her. Yet I drew a chair to her side and I took her hand. She yielded it without resistance but there was no life in it.

"You gave it to me," I said.

She looked at me inquiringly.

"Upstairs."

"Just a dodge," she said. She smiled faintly.

"Intriguer!"

"I hate it," she said.

I raised her hand to my lips and it stiffened. She rose and I with her. I held the hand and drew her towards me.

"Don't weaken me," she said. I stopped.

"Why should I not strengthen you?"

"I've got to keep faith."

"With Bill?"

"With him. Yes."

"I wonder if I understand?"

"He wants me. He's dying."

"Strange egoism!" I said.

"He hasn't much left now."

"I wouldn't take you from him."

"I must be free."

I dropped her hand. And then she grasped at mine and wrung it. "Friends. Oh, friends!" she said. I thought a moment. "You, me, Bill," I said; "an equal trinity of friendship?"

"Not quite that."

"I am excluded?"

"I must give him what I can."

"And for me?"

"Wait, wait."

"Time is on my side?—and death?"

"He has never appealed," she said. "He has not said a word. But I know I must give all I can."

"And sacrifice me?"

"Would it content you to believe that I sacrifice something too?"

"He's dying. You tend him. That's enough."

"I must give," she cried. "I must give."

Ah, that was it! The instinct to give was always there. She would take from me to give to him, but that was the way of sacrifice for her too. She read something of my thoughts. She said, "You're his friend."

Yes, I was selfish. How could she go from my embraces to meet his eyes? And then a thought struck me and I said bluntly, "Is it all part of your religion?"

She turned away and I feared that I had chilled or affronted her. But no. She looked at me gently, beseechingly. "All suffering reminds me"—she said and stopped. Shyness had come over her. "It reminds me"—her voice sank to a murmur—"of the Cross."

I experienced a contraction, a sensation akin to terror. It was not only Bill that dispossessed me. His race would soon be run. I cherished an honest grief for him; he was, indeed, my dear friend and for him I would wait or I would renounce honestly. Now he appeared as a symbol of something menacing; a threat to sanity, to life, to sunshine and happy days. I was losing ground,

I was wasting time, I was oppressed by a monstrous punctilio. It was time to sweep all this aside, to have done with delicacies and considerations, to claim my mate. I strode towards her and stopped. She was a statue, she was a saint; you cannot take a saint in your arms. She put out her hand to fend me off, to lead me. She said, "Come and see him," and we went. He still sat up, supported by pillows, and when we came near the bed he pulled her towards him and put his arm about her. She submitted meekly. And then his other hand clutched me and drew me down into the self-same embrace. Brady and the nurse looked on benevolently. It was beautiful, his gesture had been noble, and when we rose she looked at me as if to ask whether I was not content.

It became a closed chamber. The nurse was there, a miracle of discretion; Brady came and went and so did I; his mother visited him and Jessie came at decent intervals; but we were not more than accessories. I encountered the nurse on her daily walk and, ranging myself with her, began a friendly conversation. I'm afraid I regarded her as a sort of gramophone with some wonderful secret records and I had to keep my curiosity in order. For I was intensely curious. It seemed to me that the strangest and deepest thing in the world was happening almost under

my eyes—the thing that concerned me most nearly —and I was missing it. I understood a great deal. I could have given any outsider quite a respectable formula for the relations of Rose and Bill and certainly could have defended my formula with all sorts of ingenuities and eloquences. And yet I didn't understand. I didn't know how deep they went or how far, nor what attitudes and reserves helped them; whether they drifted or struggled, whether they would explore together some mystical heart of things that was beyond me. All the brave lusts of the world were dead—you had but to look at Bill's face to know that. When I looked at him I was baffled; I told myself that he was becoming spiritual, but I didn't know what I meant by it; Bill's was no faint spirit. He watched her continually and I told myself it was a fixed idea, the mere persistence of what belonged to health and power. She was on her guard. I think that when I was there she never lost consciousness of me; she made much of me with all sorts of little considerations and kindnesses. Bill, too, would rouse himself to gallant spurts of comradeship, he would roll out the old jokes with the ghost of the old zest; the poor fellow even attempted grossness. Their condescensions brought to me doubts of myself. I felt the insecurity of the logical habit, the insufficiency of my old sceptical defences;

I mistrusted deeply this critical habit of attempting the formula.

I walked in the pleasant, autumn fields with the nurse while our minds continually reverted to the familiar sick-room. We talked politely of things in the landscape but she was as little interested in them as I. Everything pointed one way. I don't know how it was that we found ourselves talking of nuns, of "sisters of mercy," of the monastic life.

"I suppose you're a sort of nun," I said; "your profession——"

"No; I'm only a nurse. She's more like——" she stopped. We had not mentioned Rose's name.

"Would she make a nurse?" I said.

She considered that. "Well, she seems to be looking through it all at something else."

"The doctor, the medicine bottles, you?"

"She's always very kind — and she'll do anything." The woman had her professional instincts and was loyal to them.

"It must all seem very strange to you," I ventured.

"I sometimes think that every case is strange."

"But this—what a discreet person you are!—don't you feel very curious? Don't you want to understand?"

"It's a case," she said.

"You don't go beyond that?"

"If you mayn't talk you get out of the way of thinking."

"Oh, come!" I said. "Is that true?"

"We have our notions of what's right."

"I'm sure you have. I admire you—all of you—extremely. But you can't be much different from the rest of us. Aren't you intensely interested—don't you wonder and speculate — yes, and watch?"

"We watch the case."

"And all that belongs to it?"

"We mind our own business."

"You talk to the doctor about it?"

"About the case. Yes."

I don't know why I pressed her. I certainly wouldn't have tried to enlist her as a spy, an informer. I wanted to know the strength and limits of her austerity. She, too, had her private life, her thoughts, ideals, her mystery. I snatch at interests and this one was near the central interest. I was profoundly baffled and a small recklessness was a relief. "Here are people living and dying," I said. "We're a queer lot. It's all most unusual. Passions and renunciations and resentments — all under your eyes — and you fix

your eyes steadily on the medicine bottles. You're magnificent."

"What do you want me to do?" she said. And then she added: "I won't do it."

"I think you are making a mistake. I don't ask you for anything."

"To tell you things? To observe and report to you?"

I considered. "No. Of course I'm intensely interested in every word, every look."

"And if I began to gossip you would listen?"

"Gossip!"

"That's what we call it."

We reverted to our small talk of the landscape and I never attempted intimacy with her again. Yet I was glad to have gone so far. I was assured of her discretion and yet she had become now a point of interest in the sick-room. I was interested in it all, in the whole imbroglio; if to be a true lover you must concentrate on your mistress and never think of anything else I was not one. It was Rose in the world and of the world that I loved; yes, and I wanted her more in the world than she was; I wanted her to join the rest of us. She had always been aloof and now it seemed that Bill was admitted into her aloofness. They had this understanding. Or had they? Did it mean anything? Sometimes it seemed that they were just children

with a secret—a secret that meant nothing at all. I didn't understand, they gave me no clue, there was nothing to investigate. What did they talk about when I was not there? Neither was a sentimentalist and yet I asked myself whether the essence of it all was not just sentiment. I was jealous and I couldn't be jealous. Oh, they were immensely considerate! They brought me in very much as they brought Gertie in and we were all charmingly, beautifully friendly together. Yet there was Bill dying with a secret triumph. Sometimes he had an air of comfort, sometimes he struck me as downright fatuous. He was like a newly-accepted lover in a very attenuated world.

What had they in common? Did she try to prepare him for death? I saw nothing of it and she had never been a proselytiser. Her religion and her charity were apart and I never heard of her bothering about niggers' souls, though I am sure she would be open to an appeal for their bodies. I suppose she was just waiting for Bill to die and being kind to him; what else could there be? But she was like a lover to him; she was a lover and I acquiesced. Bill faded away and she was proud, as I was, of his gallant, spasmodic efforts. He was not willing to become gentler but he had to become fainter.

She was affectionate to me. Affectionate; that's

it. I endured it. I appreciated it. It wasn't the real thing; it wasn't even love in harness. She made no false step with me and I was absurdly punctilious. I pressed no advantage, I took no chances. Oh! we were fair, we were more than fair to Bill. We must give him what we could for there was very little left for him. She began to look tired and it wrung my heart. I longed to take her in my arms but I dare not. And she had her supports, whatever they might be worth. I thought of her Christ now as a cold, implacable figure, steeling her to the task. He made no concessions; he was like Ibsen's Brand with that infernal All or Nothing. Yet he had blessed the children and I could think of Rose as a child. She was a warm, sweet woman, I believed, but now the best of life was in abeyance. Yet still she glowed and thrilled mysteriously as she looked at the wasting, suffering figure on the bed.

CHAPTER XV

THE MYSTERY

At times I craved diversion. I went about, I called on friends or acquaintances, I tried the society of women; one day I waited in a little drawing-room of a Manchester suburb and passed the time in considering its pictures and ornaments. They were heterogeneous; my friend had not concentrated on some perfect specimens of austere taste but had made a sort of lumber-room of the soul's history. It was very interesting; the room was full of mysteries, shallow and deep, and a starting-point for query and surmise. When she came to me I said something of the kind. "Confess," she said, "that you're thinking it wants a good spring cleaning."

I handled a little plaster group and showed fingers innocent of dust. "Of course, I don't mean physical dirt," she said, "but you're wondering why I keep that there. Well, I can't bear to part from things. It's bad, I know, but the man gave it to me and there was something appealing in his futility. Ought I to replace it with the Venus or a Winged Victory?"

"No," I said; "let's specialise a bit on ourselves."

She looked round and became apologetic. "It grows on one," she said; "there's rubbish here with no justification at all."

"You carry your life with you."

"One grows old."

"Yes," I said; "I hate this notion of wiping things out as we go along. Some of these young folk would be born afresh every day."

"Still," she said, "I overdo it."

"And everything here is related to you"—I looked around again—"everything belongs more to another time than to this." My eye rested on a little framed photograph that stood on the mantelpiece. "I wonder what this is." I took it up.

"Don't you know?" she said.

It was unusual in design—two women's heads in profile, the one overlapping the other, as you sometimes see on a medallion. They seemed to gaze mournfully at something far away. It might have been vanished and vanishing youth. They were mother and daughter; one could see that. I turned to my friend.

"It's Christina Rossetti and her mother," she said.

Of course. I remembered her brother Dante's drawing of her when she was young and strange,

but this was a woman sad with accomplishments, with a lost youth behind her. Her biographies say that religion estranged her from her lover; she found a lover more pervasive and exacting. We looked at the picture in silence. You could see many things in it and read into it more. These women were very near to one another and yet mournfully apart. The mother's renouncements were completed—or was her resignation even now disturbed by questionings? What had time left her? Illustrious children? The prides and triumphs were an old tale now, the children had no need of her. Even this daughter at her side——

And the daughter had found Christ. What had she lost? The two were gazing out into a future that was very like a past. They were outside the boisterousness of life. And now they were dead. I was conscious of the woman at my side and knew her to be thwarted and disillusioned, and yet with reserves of fortitude, even of gaiety. Our silence had lasted long moments and I became nervously aware of it. I said something stupidly obvious about Christina Rossetti's poems — about *Goblin Market.*

She said impatiently, "*Goblin Market* is not the point."

"Isn't it her masterpiece?" I said weakly.

"I daresay."

"Ah! It's not the masterpieces you seek." I looked about her room and it seemed intense with memories. "You spoke just now of spring cleaning," I said, "and I've an awful vision of this room scoured and empty. I've seen rooms like that. The books and pictures are put away somewhere, the carpets are up, the fires are out, there's a dreadful cleanness and bareness; the life of the room has gone. Or it's only suspended? There's a gap, but all comes right again; warmth and homeliness flow in. Some day it won't come right."

I don't think she was following me. "*Goblin Market* is fresh and strange," she said. "Yes. She could do that when she was young. Those Rossettis were a queer lot."

She would not talk of them more, but when I went she gave me the *New Poems*, having ascertained rather casually that I hadn't read them.

When I came to read them it seemed that I was finding something of which I was in search; that, at least, here was a clue. What can we offer women with these deep possessions? All mine shrivelled though I knew that the lusty earth, the teeming earth is better than abstractions. I had seen Rose's face genial and happy. She was still within the sunlight; here was a woman who had

passed to the inner shrine. And yet, as I rebelled against it all, I felt that my easy agnosticisms did not apply here. I asked myself if I had ever lived so intensely.

" When all the over-work of life
Is finished once, and fast asleep
We swerve no more beneath the knife
But taste that silence cool and deep;
Forgetful of the highways rough,
Forgetful of the thorny scourge,
Forgetful of the tossing surge,
Then shall we find it is enough?

* * * * *

To give, to give, not to receive!
I long to pour myself, my soul,
Not to keep back or count or leave
But king with king to give the whole.
I long for one to stir my deep—
I have had enough of help and gift—
I long for one to search and sift
Myself, to take myself and keep.

You scratch my surface with your pin,
You stroke me smooth with hushing breath:—
Nay pierce, nay probe, nay dig within,
Probe my quick core and sound my depth.

You call me with a puny call,
  You talk, you smile, you nothing do:
  How should I spend my heart on you,
My heart that so outweighs you all?

* * * * *

Not in this world of hope deferred,
  This world of perishable stuff:—
Eye hath not seen nor ear hath heard
  Nor heart conceived that full 'enough':
Here moans the separating sea,
  Here harvests fail, here breaks the heart:
  There God shall join and no man part,
I full of Christ and Christ of me."

I guarded the book jealously; I was queerly, queerly afraid of Rose getting hold of it. It might be dangerous for her as all the great and noble things in the world are dangerous. Perhaps she had the book — was intimate with it? — and I wanted to ask her. After a circumspect attempt I did ask her bluntly if she knew Christina Rossetti's poems. I knew that Rose was not very deep in literature and I was hardly surprised when she said, without emphasis, that she had read *Goblin Market* and "one or two others." I watched her face carefully and there was no change there; no subtle, furtive change. I went away chuckling, as though it were a good joke.

Of course she was preoccupied now, but it was clear that she knew nothing about the matter. How had she missed it? How do we miss things? I could have shouted to her that she was stupid, an ignoramus; that I had found out a lot about her that she did not know herself. It was only words and someone else's words, but they were tremendously to the point. And then I had one of those half-sham moral dilemmas with which the idly ingenious will vex themselves. Oughtn't I to tell her? Oughtn't I to give her the book and say that it must be profoundly interesting to her, that however deeply she had gone here were greater depths? But can these devotees learn from one another, practise on one another? There is no friendliness in religion; rituals, creeds, humiliations, exaltations may be in common, but when it comes to love and help we only want men and women.

I suppose that every religion is a marshalling of what in some degree we all have in common, and I'm one of those who don't marshal and don't even assemble very often. A few old thoughts and aspirations have a way of recurring and they gain a sort of authority; I would not say of sanctity, for that is a word I can't use precisely. Perhaps the nearest I've come to a creed has been loosely shaped out of *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of*

Earth and *A Reading of Earth,* but I could never pretend that this would do for everybody. I failed to interest Rose in these books—I'm not sure that she ever made a fair attempt at them—and I remember the discouragement that came with the conviction that there was some fundamental difference between us. I've come to doubt these so-called fundamental differences; so much of them may be resolved by patience and kindness and honesty. Christina Rossetti had her intimate and peculiar visions; to what she can give of them I respond thrillingly — I, the hardened agnostic. It is possible that she would have resented this or that Rose would resent my dilettante excursions into her deep places. Of course I think that there is something accidental in this connection with a particular legend, though I am left wondering how much of illusion is necessary for the deepest experience. Oh! I've boggled over these things many a time—humbly, resentfully, in many moods. I've sometimes thought that I could give her more humanity and sometimes that she was wholly, overwhelmingly human. What did these fancies of renouncement and devotion matter?

I've told myself bitterly that for her a garden is a place of agonies, the body an object on which the implacable spirit must wreak its vengeance.

So she appeared to me sometimes and I felt her capable of the monstrous stupidities; of evading sex and motherhood. There have been women who have lived with husband and children and yet translated all their deep experiences into terms of consciousness with their fanciful Gods. Rose should have her locked chambers — we must all have them—but could I always refrain from prying jealously about them? I would not begrudge her the quiet refuge and yet I should find it hard to still my questionings, to subdue insistent sympathies. Would she repulse me? Would she come to fear me? Might it be that this hidden chamber would become to me a core of insincerities, to her an evasion, a withdrawal from my importunities? These religious people build their temples and when a life has been spent at the work they dare not search to find them empty. What did her shrine contain? What do shrines contain? It is not a case for chemical analysis. She was cherishing an illusion, gaping at a dim old tragedy. I only asked her to be human, for to devote yourself to the sick, to devote yourself to God, is to be inhuman. And yet what could I offer? What am I and what have I done? I've acquired same sort of self-control, done a citizen's duty creditably; I've even diffused some sort of kindliness. Moderation! Moderation!

What does it matter whether you are right or wrong? She guarded something tenaciously, and it's that that mattered. You die for the flag, not the Cause.

She seemed to be escaping me. Bill had fortified her against me and, at least, I had to wait—as one waits a decent interval before proposing to a widow. I saw her often but she seemed to grow more remote. It was not natural; she was not natural with me and I could sometimes believe that she dare not be. She had ceased to laugh and her smile had become a straitened, professional one. She was appearing in her true colours; once she had puzzled me with brightness and gaiety; I've heard people call her a jolly girl. I wanted Bill to die and be done with it, and yet when I saw him I felt he must be kept going at all costs. He had yet a hold on life and it was on all his life. When he went out, it seemed, the loss would be too tremendous.

The sick-room, with its dispositions of furniture, its bottles and contrivances, became a part of me. They tolerated me and I was even a welcome distraction, but I knew that when the door closed behind me the atmosphere changed. And when I was there I watched them, I studied them intently. I think we were all conscious of that and, really, it seemed that they baffled me with the utmost

friendliness; they were benevolent to me as to a curious child. Bill loved her, of course—whatever that may mean. It was a distillation of love, it was a mystical Bill, a Bill without the senses. Something in life he had missed and he was concentrating on it now; and to her he was a symbol, he was Christ in man's image. I play with words, I suppose; I speak of what I only half understand. It was the old Bill that I loved, the gross, the exuberant Bill. I pitied him now because he was in pain; his poor body was suffering. I remembered all our good times together and it was dreadful that they should end in this. To Rose he had become the type of agonies. Surely you cannot love a man in agony. She ministered to him in an ecstatic, tragical calm; she had a vision of something beyond. And I could have told her that there was nothing beyond or nothing that mattered now. The nurse was more to me than Rose, because she was more skilful; she was the beneficent one, she was wisdom and help.

Yes, Rose and Bill had their understanding, but perhaps they were really not on one plane at all; they were missing one another in some queer way with an air of profound communion. Here's another mystery—Bill and she; the world is made up of mysteries and what are they? Break open the door and they are startled into some kind of

life; steal in on them and you find Bill yawning and her washing a cup. Here's the sceptic again. I was outside and so I was ready to believe there was nothing. I could have laughed at their kindness to me. Bill was even apologetic; in a strangely attenuated way he was the successful rival now. He had commonly taken what he wanted and this was no time to deny himself. And still we could be all friendly together; I treasure the vestiges of friendship. Nay; with Rose away he was capable still of relapse to the old world with me. He failed, and he was startled at his failure, over a jolly, blasphemous tale; it seemed that he could still grin faintly at the crucifix. He faded away and even so it was a stupendous joke that he should aspire to be Rose's spiritual mate. It was a joke in a world in which there were no jokes.

I think Bill died as gallantly as a man may; for you cannot force a note at the end, you cannot even be your own little self. A time came when Rose would not let me in and, sorrowfully, I acquiesced. One day he was himself; re-assuringly, charmingly, but faintly himself and then he was tired and it seemed that he couldn't be bothered with us any longer. Brady was called in hastily and presently he told me that Bill was worse, that the last stage was approaching. I think Rose

had a pride in him, a sort of proprietorship; I think she wanted me to carry away that last beautiful impression of old Bill re-asserting himself; above all, perhaps, she wanted to be relieved of the distraction of my presence. She came down to me in Bill's sitting-room after Brady had gone and stood before me looking, I thought, stony and impenetrable. I didn't resent that, I think. Then she said suddenly — "Godfrey," and paused. I thrilled to the name, though she had begun to use it—had even taught Bill to use it sometimes—and I advanced to take her hand; I had a wild surmise that the long estrangement was past. But she motioned me back. In a toneless voice she said, "Will you please not see him again—not until——" The speech was unfinished and yet hardly unfinished. She was not one to boggle over plain words, to seek for euphemisms; I think that we speak of death with a finality that she would not accept; her "until" went reverberating through great spaces.

"Why?" I said.

"I want it so—Godfrey."

I could not question her, for she wanted all her strength and her mind was made up. I said, "I may come here to see you?"

She looked at me and I think she had intended to ask me to stay away, but it seemed she couldn't

do that. I think I looked at her beseechingly. Sadly I said, "Am I your weakness? I want to be your strength."

Her eyes were on me, but now they seemed to look through me and away—away to some haven of rest beyond us all. Should I have broken down her defences? Should I have taken her in my arms masterfully? I re-iterate it and I'm doomed to re-iterate. It was what she dreaded, but perhaps beyond that dread—no; she did not want my love then; she wanted no breathing human passion. We were like ghosts.

Yes, I've sometimes said to myself in dejection and resentment that she is just a cold woman. One makes a great pother about it and, of course, you can go infinite lengths on intuition and surmise. I don't know her. I've never known her. She is superficially attractive. She is one of Nature's coquettes with her rich colour, her laughter, gay and mellow, and that baffling, invincible coldness.

She said I might come sometimes and I came often. She would not always see me and I've sat for hours in Bill's sitting-room waiting for her. I did not always tell her I was there, although it was not difficult to send a message. I did not want to trouble her but I wanted to be near. I've crept in quietly and then wished that I had made some sound which, in the little house, might have

penetrated to her; I've even made a slight clatter to give myself a chance. Sometimes she came suddenly and unexpectedly and I felt like a child discovered. I had nothing to say; I ceased, almost, to have anything to say. Yet I was distressed, for she was becoming a stranger, she was slipping away and away. I could have believed sometimes that it was no agitation for her to meet me but perhaps a bit of a bore. Hardly that, but a slight interruption as when a dear child breaks in upon some preoccupation.

But a change came. She became nervous and distracted; she said things that I didn't understand; it was as though one should answer the intruding child distractedly — out of the deeper consciousness. She talked of Bill again—after a long interval. Or was it of Bill? It was of a figure, a body, in agony. I could not recognise it.

I saw Brady and he was greatly disturbed. He was our hold on sanity and yet he talked wildly. He denounced the absurdity and the irrelevance of the medical profession. He admitted that he was nonplussed, that he felt himself to be useless. I was puzzled and suggested that even now he might like to have a specialist out again. He glared at me questioningly and I muttered something weakly about "a second opinion."

"D'you mean about Campion?" he said.

"If you like. Yes."

"What the devil d'you want a second opinion for? Don't you know he's dying?"

"Well, what do you want?" I said.

"It's Miss Avory."

"What is it? What is it?" I cried. "What do you mean?"

"She's perfectly sane," he said.

I waited and he went on: "I suppose you understand better than I do. Campion was no saint. Of course I knew that. Then why—I'm up against something I don't understand. She's sane enough. She's got hold of herself — tight. I don't like it, Fenn. Did you mean for her? A mental specialist? Nonsense! She's sane enough."

"Just tell me what it is," I said.

He hesitated. "I find I can't explain," he said. He was a loyal fellow.

I strode out of the room to the foot of the stairs and then came back. "Is he conscious? Can he hear me?" I said.

"You won't trouble him now."

I went again and called: "Rose—Rose."

The door upstairs opened and closed and she came down to us swiftly. She looked from one

to the other enquiringly, reproachfully. Brady said, "Nothing can reach him now."

"But it insults him," she said; "it insults him hanging there. You should be very quiet now."

Brady turned to look at me and she saw some sort of understanding pass between us. "Oh, yes, I know!" she said. It's Bill — it's Bill Campion. It isn't Christ hanging on the Cross. I ramble a little now and then. Hanging between life and death; that's what I mean."

Brady left us and we heard him tramping slowly upstairs.

"My dearest love," I said, "you must let me help you now; you must let me be with you."

She looked at me as if considering this, as if appraising something. Then she said: "I must be faithful. It's not for long. Yes—yes, it is; it's for all time." She looked at me as though with an intent curiosity. Ah! if I had never met you," she said. "I wonder——"

I stood before her baffled and downcast and she was sorry for me. "Don't be jealous of Bill," she said. "Why! He's washed white as a little child. If you could see him now."

"Let me see him. Let me go in with you."

But she was alarmed at that and, shaking her head, moved towards the door. She could not go because she was so sorry for me. She belonged

to another world, but still I had some part in her; she was sorry for me.

"Soon it will be different," she said. "Soon we can think."

"And now," I said, "I'm a hindrance. You wish you had never seen me."

She looked at me tenderly. "How could that be?"

"You shilly-shally," I said. "You would and you would not. Bill's dead. He'll never speak or listen or think again. You've let him out of the world gently. Now it's our turn."

She shrank from my brutality, opposing it with a gentle persistence. "Now he is most like Christ," she said. "I see him so. And the agony has gone."

"You see Christ as a worn-out thing," I said. "A sufferer, a mere body, something to be hurt. I believe in him as a strong man preaching hard things and doing them."

She said eagerly: "You too—each in our own way."

And I began to talk at large with a sort of eloquence about the great spirits of the world, the great dogmatists; of Tolstoy and Ruskin and Christ. She listened at first hopefully and then her attention slackened. I saw it was no good and

began to labour. She interrupted me: "He is not one with the rest."

I believe I would have agreed with her but she would not listen. She shrank away and it was not from the fear that I might convince or undermine; I saw that I was hardly more than irrelevant. And her secret was incommunicable, her possession was one that I could never share. She withdrew in spirit before she left me alone in the room. Yet as she went it seemed that she was looking at me wistfully from another world. She even said: "Don't weaken me. I must hold out." It was not a strenuous appeal but, it seemed, more like a friendly concession; I could twist it into a ridiculous little compliment to my power. She went away to her pious rites, to the tender handling of the body, to the cult of the figure on the Cross.

And I was left fuming. I assured myself that this could not be the end and, indeed, I had her words for that. Was her natural end some sort of a convent? I would fight against that with all the force that was in me and I had cold comfort in the thought that convents are for the weak; she was strong in her power of withdrawal. And yet a convent might be easier for her in the end. I hate these places with their degrees of negation, their ridiculous theory that as life fades you become more and more absorbed in the spiritual; I hate

their shams of kindly, comfortable direction, their paraphernalia of grilles and rosaries, strait garments of black and white, the clacking of prayers. These women, too, are drugged, hypnotised, terrified. Sack and rape are hardly greater crimes against humanity; the prostitute on the streets is but the other extreme.

And what had all this to do with Bill—with Bill upstairs there, breathing his last? The brave, exuberant Bill was played out and what remained of him abandoned to ceremony, to idle ceremony and all the sentiments of the occasion. He had made a great success of his dying; it was a stupendous joke, the biggest he had accomplished. And yet he was too big for it all. I thought of what Charles Lamb wrote about Coleridge or, rather, of its refrain. This refrain was "Coleridge is dead," and it breaks in again and again like a mighty blow to incredulity. And already I was saying to myself, "Bill's dead. Bill's dead!" practising for the event that hammered at my mind.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT THEN?

BILL—of all people—held to that stupid, superstitious conviction about his unborn child; he was sure that it would be a boy and before he died he arranged with Jessie that the name should be William Godfrey. It was a boy and Jessie would have had me his godfather. I believe I might have strained the point and consented but that Rose looked coldly on the project; perhaps, if necessary, she would have positively dissuaded me. Jessie resented this and, indeed, I think her resentment towards Rose became general and implacable. She could not overcome it and yet I knew she had great revulsions of feeling, and these two women had cried in one another's arms when Bill died. Jessie was jealous of Rose's handling the child, and yet she would put it into her arms; she blew hot and cold, she was inscrutable and beyond reason. And there was Reuben Harper waiting to marry her if she would; a dour, patient, unlovely figure of constancy. She would and she would

not, and I think some day she may consent if mere incapacity to make a concession does not forbid.

Reuben is not a tactful man to make opportunities and she will not let him approach her—as he would be willing to do—by the child. I'm not a match-maker but I've argued with her. She has listened to me while I've explained that if you're honest, if you're alive you can't endure these blank refusals of love; I've found myself pleading as with Rose, using the words I might have used to her. And I believe that if Rose had married me Jessie might have consented; her jealousy of Rose was curiously intricate—she would not easily relax the privilege of being Bill's widow. It did not bring anything overwhelming in dignities and emoluments, but Bill left enough to keep mother and son going and, I suppose, some sort of commendation to his mother; I was made the child's trustee with not very clearly defined powers of guardianship. The Campions faded away after making vain offers of adoption—Bill had guarded against this, preferring, it seemed the chance that Reuben might become the stepfather. They faded away, but I fancy Mrs. Campion will not lose sight of her grandson and that Rose gives her news of him.

But Rose has gone, though Gertie tells me she will come again and sometimes she replies briefly

to my letters; I have not written often and not since I began this narrative. Have I lost her? Am I losing her? I'm at a distance and time is going. I shall settle down soon — as I think Darley has begun to regard me — into the confirmed bachelor. And I hate celibacy. I scorn the isolated, comfortable life that stretches before me. I've heard men extol it and speak of easy circumstances, consideration, of the squalor of life with children. "Ah! But a man can be jovial in his rooms with a friend and a bottle of wine," I've heard one of these bachelors say. A bottle of wine and a friend! Perhaps it's a question of vintage and of the quality of friendship. I should dread a life all strained and emphatic and there are times when rest and comfort are more to me than they should be. Must I basely acquiesce in growing old?

There, Rose! There's my version of it all and you shall read it if you will; there's my case, which is, as near as I can make it, the truth. I shall never read yours, I suppose, but what a marvellous document it would be! For you have something to tell; you have your mystery and I'm all as plain as day. Could you stand the strain? Would the mystery deepen or disperse? Would it be vastly perturbing and a great disillusionment to you, poor

dear? Ah! but what a woman would be left at the end of it all! Rose, take the risk! I don't mean write a book, for I can't see you as a literary woman and I'm conscious that I've sometimes striven to make this record shapely; there are times when its particular purpose has been forgotten. But tell me everything. Or tell me nothing but come to me. Is it possible that what I've written makes an irreparable affront—that I'm further from you at the end than at the beginning? If there's nothing to be done I would not hurt you, I would not distress you.

We are not old. Nay, we are young. The world's before us and I swear we love one another. "Swear not at all," you'll say, you little Puritan, and, indeed, in much you shall command me. What would I not renounce, what would I not do, for you? My heart rises as this, my task, is fulfilled.

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